CAUCASUS WORLD

The Kalmyks

Elza-Bair Guchinova
translated by David C. Lewis

Peoples of the Caucasus

The Kalmyks

The Republic of Kalmykia is situated in the South East of the European part of the Russian Federation. The Kalmyks occupy a unique position among the peoples of Europe in several respects, most conspicuously as being the only Buddhist people group in Europe.

Until recently the Kalmyks were a nomadic people, grazing their flocks and herds in the steppe lands north of the Caspian Sea, between the Volga river and the Caucasus mountains. Since Russia's transition to a post-communist state, the Kalmyks have begun to rediscover a new sense of ethnic identity which embraces their exceptional position of being 'between Europe and Asia'.

This book provides an original and fascinating perspective on a little-known Asiatic people, whose history and culture have become intertwined with that of Europe. Providing a comprehensive introduction to the Kalmyk people, the twelve chapters provide a broad overview of the Kalmyk way of life by exploring many diverse themes, including: history; diaspora and identity; language; economy; the family; gender; food, dress and ornament; religion and the arts; and ethnicity and ideas of nationhood.

Written by a leading Kalmyk academic, this practical guide to the Kalmyk people will be a valuable resource for all those interested in the Caucasus region.

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Elza-Bair Guchinova

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Preface

In writing about the Kalmyk people of southern Russia, including ethnographic descriptions of life in the past as well as studies of more modern topics using the methods of social anthropology, it is difficult to be the author of a book about the people group of which one is oneself a member. My hope is that this subjectivity has been a help to me in the preparation of this book, as it has been an emotional stimulus and has forced me to be open and candid in everything.

Unfortunately it is impossible to put together in one volume everything that one would like to include. Therefore the author has had to make a selection and keep only to those subjects which are fully essential for the study of historical-cultural issues, without whose elucidation the ethno-cultural appearance of the Kalmyk people would have a substantial gap. It was for this very reason that the decision was taken to devote a separate chapter to the history of the deportation of the Kalmyks and the serious ethno-cultural consequences evoked by it, as if extracting this subject out of its historical context. I consider this as justified for a number of reasons: not only because these thirteen 'accursed' years have become a special period in the history of the people, but also because this painful experience, acquired at a high cost in human lives, has to be thoroughly studied by contemporary scholarship. In the years of exile Kalmyk culture became stigmatized, as a consequence of which it ended up with a different configuration. The final chapter of this book is devoted to national leadership and the place of political mythology in contemporary social consciousness. In addressing contemporary issues, I have wanted to show the Kalmyk nation of today and the place of tradition in their daily life, all the more so as the core of the book relates to the people's historical past. Other chapters present analyses of cardinal facets of the life of the Kalmyk people and constitute an introductory ethnography of the Kalmyks.

The overall number of the main chapters in the book comes to twelve. This is a special 'round' number in the Kalmyk culture, as it is reckoned that an attribute of all the most important phenomena of a natural or cosmic character is that they are divisible by twelve: this is extrapolated on to all phenomena in the cultural sphere – for example, on to the twelve-year

animal cycle, all the parts of which constitute a single sacred whole.[1] Therefore I believe it is not possible to exceed the fullness of this number – otherwise, it would alter the proportions of the book and dilute the significance of the chosen topics.

I would like to thank Professor Natalya Zhukovskaya, Dr Vladimir Sanchirov and Dr Levon Abrahamian for their great professionalism and advice, which significantly assisted in the writing of this work.[2]

Foreword

For centuries, the Kalmyks have balanced themselves between two worlds in what has proved an enviable model for co-existence. As one of the world's most ancient defined ethnic groups, they have managed to preserve their culture and identity via a complex life cycle that still determines the people of today.

Sometimes called 'Europe's only Buddhist nation', Kalmyks are proud of their twin heritage of Mahayana Buddhism and their Mongolian past – they still live the Taga or Laws of Chinggis Khan, the Code of the Steppe entwined with the modern constitution of the Russian Federation. In fact Kalmyk history has long been linked to that of Russia since the rule of Ayuka Khan (1669–1742), the head of a mighty Kalmyk khanate and who came to be recognized equally by Tsar Peter the Great in Russia and the Dalai Lama in Tibet. Never a conquered people, the Kalmyks had opted to join the Russian empire, joining the ranks of its fiercest defenders.

This has traditionally been a two-way relationship from which both have benefited. But within this history lie dark chapters – the twentieth century in particular brought the Kalmyks four of their greatest trials: abandoning their nomadic life, mass deportation, the near loss of their language, and learning to live in Europe's first man-made desert. Without doubt, the darkest chapter is that of the deportations of 1944 that brought the people to the brink of extinction. Although a full history of the cataclysmic causes are beyond the scope of this book, it is crucial for our understanding of the collective Kalmyk psyche that they be outlined here.

The creation of the Soviet Union in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917 had guaranteed many ethnic groups, among them the Kalmyks, the right to self-determination in their own territories but the increasing state-sanctioned violence of Stalin's Years of Terror was soon to cast its shadow over every citizen in the union. Kalmykia suffered its own share of arrests, exiles and executions, and by the end of the 1930s all its Buddhist temples had been destroyed.

In 1939 the Second World War (or the Great Patriotic War, as it was called in the Soviet Union) broke out and the forces of Nazi Germany swept through Europe and beyond. A key part of Hitler's master plan for the

invasion of the Soviet Union was to seize Chechnya's refineries, Azerbaijan's oilfields and Central Asia's gasfields – these were intended also to provide a launchpad to oil-rich Iran and Iraq. The Nazis invaded the Greater Caucasus region in 1942, occupying a huge territory including the western half of Kalmykia and its capital Elista.

Anxious to avoid alienating the newly conquered peoples, the Nazis immediately offered to guarantee their rights – in grim contrast to the genocidal treatment of minorities in Western and Eastern Europe. The Nazis even proposed the creation of a self-governing region linking all of the Caucasus and Kalmykia. For these fiercely independent Soviet citizens, exhausted by the war effort, occupied by yet another totalitarian military power, and desperate for stability and the chance to end the years of tyranny, there was little choice in the matter.

In many ways, therefore, the Nazis were seen as liberators from Stalin's murderous rule. In Kalmykia, for example, they permitted the practice of Buddhism again and offered to dismantle the hated collective farms and to privatize the land. Members of the Kalmyk people joined SS and volunteer divisions – Kalmyks are used to making decisions as a group and this was counter to the wishes of the people, although they still feel shame on account of the actions of these individuals.

The Nazis, however, had overstretched themselves on every front and had to withdraw in 1943 under Allied pressure. The Red Army's counter offensive retook most of the occupied Caucasian territories and at once put in motion a plan to deport wholesale those it had branded as 'suspect peoples'. Among these, the Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Meskhetian Turks and Crimean Tatars were neither Slavic nor Christian, and most of them had not been in the Russian or Soviet empires for long. The devastation of the cattle trucks used to deport the Kalmyks in bitter mid-winter stood in stark contrast to the state honours given for the unparalleled heroism of their menfolk in battle against the Nazis on the eastern front – soldiers who fought unaware of the horror that was taking place at home. Almost half of the deportees perished as a result of the journey eastwards, while the exile as 'non-people' in Siberia and Central Asia proved to be as much a death sentence for those who survived, barred from work and unable to even feed their own families. Their capital Elista, meanwhile, was literally wiped off the map.

With Stalin's death and the gradual liberalization by his successor Khrushchev, the Kalmyks, along with most of the other deported peoples, had their status reinstated and much of their original land (in theory at least) restituted. In 1957 the government revoked the accusation of Nazi collusion and, over 1957–8, Kalmyks were gradually permitted to return from Siberia to their re-created republic. Since then they have tried to forget these '13 accursed years and 13 days', a process made difficult by the weight of the Soviet Union's case made against them. To be branded 'traitorous'

was a horrific dishonour in light of their sworn loyalty to Russia, and each and every Kalmyk family today still lives with this legacy.

Despite this, the Kalmyks have forged ahead. The preservation of their status within an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation in 1992 is a transition that is more or less assumed, allowing them the chance to continue to preserve their culture as well as increased exposure internationally. But there is much that still needs to be done. The 1960s and 1970s saw an increase in Russification throughout the Soviet Union, which hit the weakened Kalmyk nation just as the new generations sought to find their feet, placing their native language under threat. It was also during this period that Soviet agricultural and irrigation policies accelerated the desertification of Kalmykia. This was followed by the collapse of the republic's economy as the Soviet Union fell apart at the end of the twentieth century.

The subsequent rebuilding of the Kalmyk nation makes for a compelling comparison with the fate today of the Chechens, Crimean Tatars and other deported peoples, adding to our understanding of the region in general and its unalterable distinctness from (Slavic) Mother Russia, despite the centuries of co-existence. Today integration within the Russian Federation is a reality for Kalmyks, but the fact that Kalmykia is a republic with its own president within this federation means that ethnicity and traditional values are able to be strengthened, even if it is unclear how these will sit within the increasingly centralized Russian state.

A striking image for any visitor to Kalmykia during the late 1990s was the central square in Elista where a statue of Lenin (who was part Kalmyk) had been turned around to face the newly erected statue of Buddha. It was a striking example of how the Kalmyks' unique culture continues to evolve through adaptation, despite the problems of prejudice, ecological disaster and a drain of its people to other regions. In order, therefore, to understand where the Kalmyks are going we need to understand where they have come from. This book sympathetically and expertly provides such an understanding not only by putting the people in the context of their historical neighbours and allies but also by going right to the soul of the Kalmyks themselves.

Nicholas Awde
Series Editor
Caucasus World

Map of Kalmykia

Introduction

For more than four centuries the Kalmyks have been living in the European part of Russia. During this time the Kalmyks have become familiar with that part of southern Russia which became a new homeland for the nation. In the same period much has happened in the making of the Kalmyks as an ethnic community. The Oirats were changed into Kalmyks, having taken this new name. Being able to preserve their traditional occupation, after adapting it somewhat to the new landscape, the nomads fully occupied a new ecological niche.

The lands populated by Kalmyks had for a long time previously been known to the Russians as the Povoletsk steppe. After the appearance of Kalmyks here its name was changed to the Kalmyk steppe. At first glance seemingly lifeless, especially in summer, the Kalmyk steppe presents itself as unique, there being nowhere to compare with it elsewhere in the world in terms of the preservation of a steppe gene-pool. Situated at the junction between two bio-geographical regions – the European and the Irano-Turanian – Kalmykia has a rich assemblage of both flora and fauna: living here are desert, semi-desert, steppe and inter-zonal forms of plants, as well as vertebrate and invertebrate animals.

Surrounded by the rivers Don, Volga and Kuma, and by the north-west coast of the Caspian Sea, the Kalmyk steppe is divided geographically into three parts: the Caspian lowlands, the Yergeni heights and the Kumo-Manych depression. The climate in the republic is sharply continental. Throughout the whole year strong winds blow, which in the summer alleviate the intense heat. During the summer there are dust storms. Summers are hot, with temperatures at times reaching 44 °C, whereas in winter they often drop to minus 30 °C. There is little precipitation, and not much snow in winter.

In contemporary Kalmykia there are considerable ecological problems. One of these is connected with the rise in water level in the Caspian Sea, which has begun to flood settlements near to the Caspian. Another ecological disaster is a result of human activity, namely the desertification of more than 80 per cent of the territory of Kalmykia. It is the first European 'man-made' desert, having been formed as a result of the degradation of the 'black lands', periodic strong droughts, frequent hot, dry winds and the low

precipitation which reinforces the aridity of this region. If unchecked, the continuing process of desertification could also represent a threat to other parts of Europe.[1]

Particular attention is paid in this book to the traditional culture of the Kalmyks – the economy, religion, rituals and other phenomena of folk culture that were characteristic for Kalmyk society at the beginning of the twentieth century. As is the case for many other numerically small ethnic groups, in an era of globalization contemporary Kalmykia represents a completely different society – one suffering from features of ethnic crisis, primarily in the linguistic sphere. As for its politics, Kalmykia is a presidential republic, one of the constituents of the Russian Federation. In 1993 the first President of the Kalmyk Republic was chosen.

Historical and ethnographic research on the Kalmyk people has its own story. It began in the second half of the eighteenth century and was stimulated by the demands of the Russian state, which needed to know as much as possible about its new subjects. Russia's advance in socio-economic and cultural development is inseparable from the activities of the Academy of Sciences and the expeditions it organized, in which the participants showed significant interest in studying the peoples of Russia, including the Kalmyks.[2] The basis for Kalmyk studies was laid in Russia, within which, in time, historical and philological orientations developed. Right to the present time the foundational literature on Kalmykia and the Kalmyks has been written in Russian. The first publication focusing on the Kalmyks appeared in 1728 in the 'St Petersburg Gazettes'.[3] Among the first works containing material on the Kalmyks, alongside information on other peoples of the Russian state, those by P. I. Rychkov, P. S. Pallas, I. G. Georgi and I. I. Lepekhin[4] have to be mentioned.

At the same time, Kalmyk national historiography continued to develop. Historical writings such as Sharab Gaban's 'Tale of the Oirats', the anonymous 'History of the Kalmyk khans' and Batur Ubashi Tyumen's 'Tale of the Derben-Oirats' allowed historians to delineate them as a particular genre of chronicles.[5] Researchers reckon that there should have been a good number of similar kinds of chronicles; however, 'the Oirat-Kalmyks' ordeal from the misrepresentation of their fate did not facilitate the conservation of historical literature'.[6] The works indicated above, however, represent a continuation of an Oirat literary heritage, a large part of which was embodied in compositions and translations of a religious character. Among works of secular literature, the most significant place was occupied by historical writings.

Kalmyk chronicles, carried out within the bounds of a general Mongolian literary tradition, carry the imprint of a wider, Oriental historiographical approach. They are characterized by many peculiarities that distinguish the above-mentioned memorabilia from similar works by other peoples. Stemming from such details is a chronological principle used in literature of this type. Hence, the author of the 'Tale of the Derben-Oirats' forewarns that its main content is 'chronological calculations of the most important events for

Oirat Buddhists', counting up how many years have elapsed from each of the events pointed out until the year in which the tale was written down – the 'year of the Hare with Earth' (1819 CE). Those recognized as most important are the years of the rebirth of Burkhan-Bakshi, of the reincarnation of Mandzhursha as khan of Kara-Kitai, of the birth of Chinggis Khan and of his descendant Timurlaine, the time when the Oirat-Olets received the nickname 'ulan zalata' (those having a red tassel), the birth of Ubushi-Khun-Taiji, the coming of the Torguts to the Volga, the fall of the Jungar khanate and the publication of the Oirat laws called the *Iki tsaajin bichig*. A further characteristic of the Oirat chronicle tradition consists of the structuring of historical material. Although at first sight European analysts are unused to it, in my opinion it is close to the spirit of the celebrated work *Experiences* by Michel de Montaigne.[7] So in the chronicles classifications of the following kind are presented:

- the names of khans and *noyon*s, tracing their descent from Chinggis Khan;
- Jungar *noyon*s who trace their descent from Tengri (i.e. God);
- the beginning of the introduction of Buddhist teaching among the Derben-Oirats;
- aphorisms of Derben-Oirat khans and *noyon*s;
- oaths of Derben-Oirat khans and *noyon*s;
- fulfilled predictions of Derben-Oirat khans and *noyon*s;
- Oirat khans and *noyon*s who had repaid good with evil;
- Oirat khans and *noyon*s who had cared for their subjects in times of calamity;
- thoughts of wise Oirat khans and *noyon*s on apportioning territory to their sons as fiefdoms;[8]
- Oirat lords whose predictions were fulfilled;
- gentry who had killed their own close relatives.[9]

Both academic schools and Kalmyk historiography of this period were characterized by the accumulation of knowledge and its transformation into science.[10]

The next step in Kalmyk historiography – that of the noble-bourgeois – covers the period from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the 1860s. It is represented primarily by authors who were officials in the administrative governing organs and who subscribed to the official conservative stance in their ideological positions. The interest in the history of the Kalmyks shown in official circles was reflected in the so-called 'custodian' historiography, characteristic of which was an attempt to show a positive role for autocracy in the development of the Kalmyk people and to present this in an apologetic style.

In this period an interest in the history of the Kalmyk people was engendered among professional Russian historians. By the 1830s a systematic

view of Kalmyk history had been formulated by Father Iakinth (N. Ya. Bichurin), who was the first in Russian scientific circles to attempt a systematic account of Kalmyk history from the downfall of the Mongol empire to the end of the eighteenth century.[11] However, the absence of a critical approach to Chinese sources ensured an array of erroneous stances.

Within the 'custodian' historiography there arose schools that at times called into question its basic ideas. The first work produced by these was *Detailed Information on the Volga Kalmyks*, by N. A. Nefed'yev.[12] In this investigation the author tried to be objective in throwing light on Russian–Kalmyk relationships, stepping outside of the boundaries of a conservative approach. This tendency was continued by P. Nebol'sin in his book *Sketches on the Life of the Kalmyks of the Khosheut Ulus*, which right up to the present remains a brilliant example of sympathetic ethnography.[13] Both works were later ascribed to the bourgeois-liberal school in the historiography of Kalmykia.

The most important and interesting works on the Kalmyks were written by officials of the Russian Tsarist administration who had a good knowledge of both the Kalmyk language and the daily life of the Kalmyks: N. I. Strakhov, F. A. Byuler and Ya. P. Dubrova. With the development of historical sciences, knowledge became more specialized and it became possible to speak of a Russian historical school of Kalmykologists who left a significant contribution to the development of knowledge about the Kalmyk people. Among its representatives one has to mention I. Zhitetskiy and especially N. N. Pal'mov.[14] More detailed information on Kalmyk historiography can be found in specialist research papers.[15]

Since then dozens of researchers – historians, ethnographers, art specialists, folklorists, philologists and others – have devoted their specialist skills to elucidating a variety of different aspects of Kalmyk history, culture and language. Mention should be made in this connection of the broad preparation in Kalmyk studies that was given special attention from the 1960s onwards. Despite the strict ideological control imposed on the social sciences during the Soviet period, Kalmykologist scholars successfully carried out scientific research work; among them was U. E. Erdniyev, the first Kalmyk ethnographer.[16]

The ideological dictates of Soviet times often led to a prioritization of political correctness to the detriment of professionalism. Nevertheless, the first academic publication following the restoration of the Kalmyks' autonomy – *Sketches in the history of the Kalmyk people* – which was co-authored by scholars from the Institute of History of the USSR, remains to the present time the fullest research on the history of the Kalmyk people.[17] Despite a rethinking of the people's history in the period after perestroika, so far there is only one general historical work that is free from Marxist-Leninist theory: this is the monograph by M. M. Batmayev.[18]

1 Pages of history

From medieval Oirats to contemporary Kalmyks

Peter the First gave Ayuka Khan a sword in an expensive sheath. As a sign, Ayuka Khan's guards loosed into the air their arrows, which, when fallen, formed a circle on the ground. 'This sword and these arrows will always guard the interests of Russia' was the reply of the Kalmyk Khan to the first Russian Emperor.

Origins of the Kalmyks

The closest ancestors of the Kalmyks were the Oirats or Western Mongols who had been living in Jungaria and the Western regions of Mongolia. More or less reliable facts about the Oirats are derived from historical sources beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By this time the historical process of transition from a social order of a so-called 'primitive society' type to feudalism, from a clan or tribal ethnic formation to a 'higher' type of ethnic community and nationhood, had been completed on the steppes of Central Asia. The evidence of the available sources allows us to see in such Mongolian confederations as the Naimans, Kereits and several others not simply tribes or tribal unions but more of a state or khanate of an early feudal type.[1] In the twelfth century the Oirats also approximated to such a type of confederation. As far back as the first half of the eleventh century several Mongolian-speaking tribes and tribal unions, among them the Oirats, had moved to the region around Lake Baikal and the upper Yenisei river.[2] At the beginning of the thirteenth century, on the eve of the formation of the Mongol early feudal state, the nomadic territory of the Oirat tribes extended in the north and north-west as far as the boundaries of the Yenisei Kyrgyz, in the east to the Selenga river and in the south to the spurs of the Altai mountains approaching the upper reaches of the Irtysh. The rout of the Naiman khanate by Chinggis Khan allowed the Oirats to occupy their nomadic territory in the west of Mongolia.

In the empire of Chinggis Khan and his successors the Oirats constituted one of the feudal domains, more or less autonomous, governed by its own sovereign princes, whose authority was hereditary. The aggressive policy of the Mongolian rulers, which had turned their people into warriors and their

country into a huge military camp, had fatal consequences for the development of forces of production.[3] Situated on the periphery of the Mongol empire, far from its centre, the Oirat feudal lords enjoyed a relative independence from the authority of the central khan, at the same time in every way possible strengthening their own power within their own estates. In contrast to the central provinces of Mongolia at that time, which had gravitated economically towards the markets of China and were dependent on them, the Oirat domains, though no less interested than the eastern Mongols in commercial exchange with China, were nevertheless less bound up with the Chinese markets as they had the opportunity partially to hide their needs on account of trade with their Western Turkic-speaking neighbours. Hence there emerged a certain territorial, administrative and, in part, economic isolation of the Oirat feudal estates. This facilitated the preservation and reinforcement of specific idiosyncrasies in the language, way of life and cultural traditions of the Oirats and at the same time distinguished them from other Mongolians. In these conditions it was impossible for tendencies towards the formation of a special Oirat Mongolian language and sense of ethnicity not to arise and be given a stimulus to develop.

As for socio-economic relations within Oirat society, they were in no way distinguished from the rest of Mongolian society. Among the Oirats at the time of the Mongolian empire, as was also the case throughout the whole of Mongolia, feudal relationships were consolidated and became predominant.

Those who became the single and fully entitled managers of the land – that is, of the pasturable teritory, the basic means of production of nomadic herdsmen – were people 'of white bone' (*tsagan jasta*), called *noyon*s. The ones who were directly involved in production – people 'of black bone' (*har jasta*) – were turned into a feudal-dependent class bearing the burden of feudal requisitions and obligations, and were attached to the land of their feudal masters, from which any unauthorized departure was severely punished by the laws of the khan. The Oirat sovereign princes – who formerly, at the beginning of the empire, had been vassals of the Great Khan who granted to them the conditional use of the nomadizing territory (*nutug*) and of the people (*ulus*) – in the course of time strengthened their economic and political positions and turned into hereditary owners of their own domains, which were called *onchi*.

The disintegration of the Chingisid empire and the expulsion of the Mongolian feudal conquerors from China in 1368 revealed deep internal contradictions in Mongolian society, the principal components of which were an absence of internal unity (which also could not easily appear under conditions dominated by a subsistence economy), the weakness of a social division of labour and an almost total absence of internal trade.

The epoch of feudal fragmentation of Mongolia began with the activities of the Oirat feudal lords. Relying on the economic might of their domains, their significant military forces and the relative cohesion of Oirat society, the Oirat princes were the first to oppose themselves to the central authority

and conducted an independent internal and external policy, not taking into account the policies of the common Mongolian rulers – the descendants of Chinggis Khan. The first half of the fifteenth century is characterized, on the one hand, by an intensification of the disorder in Eastern Mongolia and, on the other hand, by the growth in strength of the Oirat feudal lords and their political consolidation. On this basis, among the Oirat nobility an aspiration towards the establishment of their supremacy throughout all of Mongolia, and the transfer of state power into their hands, arose and began to grow stronger. This tendency had its greatest development during the years of government by the Oirat *noyon* Esen: for a short time all Mongolia had been united under his power and he had been instituted as overall Mongolian Khan, had also gained an outstanding victory over the Ming dynasty of China and had even seized the Chinese Emperor In-tszun as his prisoner.

These successes of the Oirat feudal lords promoted a further consolidation of the Oirats as a particular ethnic community. It was just at this time that there appeared on the headgear of the Oirats an ethnically distinguishing sign – a red tassel (*ulan zala*). It consisted of a small tassel of red cloth on the headgear and was later transferred from the Oirats to the Kalmyks as an essential element of ceremonial costume. The wearing of the *ulan zala* was introduced by the decree of the Oirat ruler Togon-taishi in 1437. As the Oirat costume was typically similar to that of the Eastern Mongols, the red tassel on the headgear had to become an obvious expression of the distinction between the Oirats and the remaining Mongols. Right up to the present time the Kalmyks call themselves *ulan zalata khal'mgud* – the red tasselled Kalmyks.

In the course of the history of the Oirat people their language has gradually developed into a distinct and independent one. In the thirteenth century the Oirat dialect already stood apart from the other Mongolian dialects. From this time onwards substantial changes took place of a phonetic and morphological character, and there was a noticeable increase in the number of foreign loan-words. This has been well noted by Yu. Lytkin, who wrote: 'A Turkic linguistic influence developed in the language of the Oirats or Western Mongols a softness, flexibility and resilience which was lacking in the language of the Eastern Mongols, and also a vivacity, unusual conciseness and a surprising dexterity; the ebullience in the living speech of the Oirats fully expressed their life – turbulent and active.'[4]

Oirat as an independent language was fully formed in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. The next step was the creation of the Oirat written language, which had acquired a reputation as the *clear script* or *todo bichig* by the great Oirat educator and political activist Zaya-Pandita. By place of origin Namkai Dzhamtso Zaya-Pandita was Oirat, though by blood he was Khosheut. When he was seventeen years old, he was adopted by Baibagas-Khan, one of the influential Oirat princes, who in 1617 also sent this talented young man to study in Tibet. In the monasteries of Tibet Zaya-Pandita spent twenty-two years in the 'tsannit' theological-philosophical faculty, and

after successfully passing examinations in the form of disputes on theological themes he received the highest scholarly degree – that of rabdzhamba. Zaya-Pandita passed into history not only as a great teacher, the creator of the Oirat script, but also as a talented politician, who on more than one occasion averted potential bloodshed and civil strife among Oirat princes by reconciling the antagonistic sides. In 1638 he left Tibet and in 1639 came to his homeland of Jungaria. The greatness of this figure was already apparent to his contemporaries, who related to Zaya-Pandita with all due respect. Pandita was a title of the highest category. As N. N. Poppe noted in the middle of the twentieth century, this title was approximately that which in European countries is accorded to a professor emeritus at a prominent university or in Russia to a full member of the Academy of Sciences – that is, a relatively higher level than that of a doctorate at a British or American university.[5] His disciple Ratnabkhadra sketched a biography of his teacher under the title of *Moonlight: The Life of Rabjamba Zaya-Pandita* (1691). As if to meet new requirements and the process of formation of an Oirat ethnic self-consciousness, in 1648 Zaya-Pandita devised an Oirat alphabet, based on the general Mongolian alphabet, and established new rules of orthography, guided for the most part by an etymological principle of spelling. Another great service of Zaya-Pandita lies in the way that the literary language of the Oirats was determined and established by him.[6] The timely nature of the reform implemented by Zaya-Pandita is convincingly attested by the fact that in an exceptionally short time it became the single basis of the Oirat written language and Oirat literature. According to the opinion of B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, historical literature stands in first place among the original works of Oirat literature, even more underlining the fact that a historical tradition which had been most strongly developed among the Mongols was also represented among the Oirats.

Such, in their general characteristics, were the basic stages in the formation of the Oirat people – the ancestors of the Kalmyk nation. Oirats and Kalmyks are two different ethnic groups, connected with each other by perfectly obvious genetic ties: the Oirats are the ancestors and the Kalmyks their descendants. The history of the Kalmyk people, however, does not appear as simply a continuation of the history of the Oirats. Kalmyk history as such arose and developed not on the steppes of Central Asia but in the lower reaches of the Volga. The events at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries constitute a watershed separating Oirat history from the history of the Kalmyk people.[7]

What kind of ethnic composition did the Oirats have in this period? The general self-designation of the Oirats at this time was ‘Derben-Oirat’ as distinct from clan designations such as ‘Jungar’, ‘Derbet’, ‘Khosheut’, ‘Khoyt’ or ‘Torgut’. The term ‘Derben-Oirat’ is often found in historical literature. For about two centuries a discussion about the origin of this term has been going on among Mongolists. According to one of the most established opinions, a union of four Oirat tribes arose after the fall of the Mongol

Yuan dynasty in China, and its creation was directed against 40 Eastern Mongolian tribes. In the opinion of many Russian Orientalists, the Chinese, confused by similar sounding names, and, perhaps, by their close relationship, transferred on to the Elets the actions of the Oirats.[8] In favour of this reasoning is the fact that the ethnonym 'Elet' appeared in Mongolian sources only in the seventeenth century. In this way it is possible, following V. Sanchirov, to agree with the suggestion of V. Uspenskiy that 'Elut is a distorted Oirat'.[9]

The Oirats ceased to be mentioned as a separate people group in the fifteenth century, and precisely at this time there also appeared ethnic groupings of the Oirat community – or, in the opinion of other historians, political alliances – such as the Derbets and Jungars. They were in any case descendants of the ancient Oirats.

This period in the ethnic history of the Oirats continues to the present day to remain 'dark'. Until now in academic circles a discussion has continued about precisely which tribal alliances composed the 'union of four Oirats', because medieval chronicles name more than four ethnic associations: these are the Derbets, Khoyts, Khosheuts, Jungars, Torguts and Batuts.[10]

The ethnonym 'Derbet' was connected with the terminology of the military estates, because 'the Derbets were a cavalry, a formation in a square'.[11] The composition of the Derbets was complicated. In the twentieth century the people who related themselves to the Derbets were those who belonged to such clans as the Abganers, Chonoses, Sharyads, Sharnuts, Tyayachuds, Tsoroses, Tukchins and Khanuts, among whom separate groups of Merkits, Kereits, Batuts and Khoyts were also encountered.[12]

The Jungars were northern Elets, whose descent was traced from the *noyon* Esmet-Darkhan.[13] In the opinion of a number of researchers, this ethnonym is derived from the name 'zjun gar', which designated 'the left side', the left flank of an army, as the Oirats occupied the left wing of the Mongol army in combined military actions of Oirats and other Mongols.[14]

According to information from several sources, a third ethnic component that entered the composition of the 'four Oirats' was that of the Khosheuts. In the *Iletkhel shastir* it is written: 'For a long time the Khosheuts have been one of the "Four Oirats".' Their origin is traced from Khabutu Khasar, the younger brother of the emperor who was the founding ancestor of the Yuan dynasty.[15] The very word 'Khosheut', as well as many other Oirat and Mongolian terms that had become current as ethnonyms among the Oirats and Mongolians, goes back to the epoch of Chinggis Khan. The Oirats took part in the campaigns of conquest by Chinggis Khan and his descendants in China, Korea, Central Asia, the Near East, the Caucasus and Russia. Just at that time within their membership there were subdivisions of the troops with hereditary transmission of duties and privileges, which in time were converted into ethnic groups.[16] In this term, as in many others, is found a reflection of a military class of the distant past, since many designations of military personnel became ethnonyms. Hence the word 'hoshuun' in

Mongolian means 'spike', 'beak' or 'snout', and also a military class – the advance-guard formation as a kind of wedge in front of the forces.

The Torguts are a fourth ethnic component of the Derben-Oirats. In the opinion of P. S. Pallas, the Torguts were formed into a 'special horde' and separated from the other Oirats later than the other Oirat ethnopolitical unions of Khosheuts, Jungars and Derbets.[17] This ethnonym (Torgut) traces its origin from the name of Chinggis Khan's day guard, his personal guard of warriors, who as a plurality were thereby called 'Torguts'. According to field research by Kalmyk ethnologists, the contemporary Torguts reckon themselves to be related to the following clans: Merkits, Kereits, Batuts, Baguts, Kharnuts, Jungars, Zamuds, Taguds, Sharyats and part of the Tsoroses; and also in the past the Turkic-speaking Tsaatans, Kisik and Tuba.[18] Despite the widespread legend about the derivation of the Torguts from the Kereit khan Van, contemporary researchers find that the appearance of the Torguts in the historical arena is related to a later time – to the first half of the fifteenth century. According to information from the latest work in this field, a mixing of Oirats with other Mongolian tribes, and a penetration of the Oirat milieu by other Mongolian ethnic groups, which had begun in the age of Chinggis Khan (who had forcibly settled Mongolian tribes who had put up resistance to his rise), were continued in the following era, right up to the fifteenth century. The Turkhauts themselves, from whom came the later Torguts, were a service class at the time of Chinggis Khan, but later the Turkhauts' foremen, hardened in numerous battles and steadfast in their political relationships, were able to create a feudal khanate after uniting around themselves the remnants of various ancient Mongolian tribes (Merkits, Kereits etc.) Later, with the break-up of the united Mongolian state, these remnants of Mongolian-speaking tribes, which had consolidated themselves into a kind of ethnic community, entered the arena of history under the name of Torguts. It is far from coincidental that among contemporary Torguts a subdivision has been preserved, the Keryats: this speaks of the enduring vitality of their notions about their descent from Van, a khan of the Kereits. A folk etymology of the ethnonym 'Torgut' connects this term with a legend according to which it was just those 'tall, strapping people' (*torgud*), whom Togon taishi (a Kalmyk political leader) called envoys of the people, who were later included within the Oirats and became well known as Torguts.[19]

Alongside the basic 'four tribes' that made up the Derbet Oirats, many annals refer to the Khoyts. These are first mentioned approximately at the turn of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. The Khoyts appeared considerably earlier in the make-up of the Western Mongols than the Jungars, Derbets, Khosheuts and Torguts, and their origin was connected with military organization too: the Khoyts were the Western part of the army, its rearguard. However, towards the middle of the eighteenth century the Khoyts had already ceased to be a prominent ethnic group, having been assimilated among other ethnic components of the Kalmyk people.

The first mention of Kalmyks can be found in fifteenth-century Turkic literature. However, it directly connected the word 'Kalmyk' with the process of Islamization of the Golden Horde in the first half of the fourteenth century, in so far as those who began to be called Kalmyks were the ones who refused to be incorporated into Islam and remained loyal to the old religious beliefs; they did not want to migrate to Central Asia and preferred to nomadize in the steppes of the Lower Volga and Desht-i-Kipchak.[20] Hence the term 'Kalmyk' when it arose was applied to a Mongolian and Turkic-speaking population of the Golden Horde; from orthodox Muslims the appellation 'Kalmyk' was taken to mean 'a doomed remnant', 'the leftovers' or 'an apostate'. Nevertheless in academia there is no single opinion on the question of why a certain part of the Oirats began to be called Kalmyks. In the view of V. Sanchirov, the term 'Kalmyk' is confirmed as applying to Oirats only from the first half of the fifteenth century – that is, from the very time that relates to the first mention of Oirat incursions on to the territory of Muslim states of Central Asia and Eastern Turkestan, primarily Moghulistan.[21]

Even so, the version that has begun to be more dominant in recent years, and is held by such distinguished Kalmyk scholars as A. Sh. Kichikov, is one according to which the ethnonym has a different meaning: 'Khal'mag' in Kalmyk is translated as 'impetuous', which is connected 'with the rushing, ephemeral, mobile way of life of the Oirats, forced to perform swift mounted marches in conflicts with numerous enemies'.[22] In support of this hypothesis it deserves to be mentioned that a method of assimilating a territory is perceived as the manifestation of one's 'disposition'.[23] This very important component of the intra-ethnic form of the people, in the present case, is likely to have been transmitted in the ethnonym.

The term 'Kalmak', which had come into Russian historical documents at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, gradually became a self-designation for those Oirats who formed what for the Lower Volga was a new ethnic community – the Kalmyk people. The process of formation of this community occupied almost two centuries, from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century.

Later than other Kalmyk ethnonyms there appeared the ethnonym *buzava*, as the Don Kalmyks began to call themselves – that is, Kalmyks who had abandoned their own nomadizing territory and had wandered off to the Don. In this way, by the eighteenth century an ethnic group of Don Kalmyks had formed, who reinforced their distinctiveness from the basic Kalmyk ethnic mass by the way in which they were included in the Cossack class and became part of the Great Cossack Host of the Don.

On the whole, those contemporary Kalmykologist-anthropologists who have written about Kalmyk ethnonyms, in their analysis of the traditional nomadic society of the Oirats and Kalmyks have emphasized the fact that 'a specific character of the society of the Mongolian peoples is composed of the tenacity of significant survivals from a military-feudal organization with

which the Kalmyks came on to the territory of Russia'.[24] A similar opinion is held by G. O. Avlyayev, who writes about the remnants of a military-feudal social organization, brought into Russia by the Oirats, but adds, as a further distinguishing feature of the Kalmyks, 'the existence of a complex system of ethnic divisions of Kalmyk society, reflecting the multilayered ethnic self-awareness of the Kalmyks'.[25]

The Kalmyk khanate

The Kalmyks came voluntarily within the bounds of the Russian state. Their movement into Russia was gradual, and was stretched out over half a century. In this movement it is possible to pick out two stages: the first was from 1608 to 1630, when the Kalmyks were nomadizing within the environs of the Ishim and Tobol rivers; the second was from 1630 to 1637, in which time the Kalmyks moved on to the west of the Urals and to the area between the Yaik and Volga rivers.[26]

What kinds of reasons had lain behind the movement of the Kalmyk people to the Volga? Regarding this, M. L. Kichkov, a well known researcher of this period of Kalmyk history, reckons that the basic reasons for the Kalmyks' migration were:

1. A gradual increase in the number of members of the families of feudal lords led to an uninterrupted subdivision of the feudal domains, which, alongside a natural growth in the number of livestock in the herds, created a shortage of land and required an increase in pasturable territory for the nomad encampments. A lack of pasturable reserves within the territory owned by Oirats pushed their rulers into the path of internal strife and external expansion, encroaching on the nomadizing ranges of Mongol, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Nogai and other feudal lords. A confined amount of land as well as military defeats (both in internal feuds and in a period of external hostilities) again and again pushed separate groups of feudal lords into searches for new pasturable territories in a north-westerly direction.
2. A relatively sparse population density in the territories to the west of the Urals and in the Volga region, which had arisen as a consequence of the fall of the Great Nogai horde, attracted the attention of the Kalmyks and determined their movement towards the Volga.
3. A nomadic people that is occupied in livestock rearing and hunting continually needs to exchange the outputs from its own production for items of industrial or agricultural production. Once the Kalmyks had moved to the west, they gradually lost trading relations with the traditional markets of East Asia: Bukhara, Urgench and Kyzylbash (in Persia). The settlement of Kalmyks to the west of the Urals and between the rivers Yaik and Volga furnished them with an opportunity for stable trading relationships with the population of Russia.

4 The Russian state, for its part, was economically interested in a supply of horses for the army, and of draught animals as well as produce-yielding livestock for both the peasant and manorial household economy. After the entry of the Kalmyks into Russia, demand increased for articles of industrial, artisan and agricultural production.
5 The international situation to the west and south had turned out unfavourably for the Russian state. In these circumstances an aggravation of relationships with nomads in Siberia and its adjacent lands was undesirable for Russia. Military conflicts with the Kalmyks in 1607, 1611–13 and 1632 created excessive tension to the east and south-east of the Russian state. Making use of the shortage of pasture among the Kalmyks and their interest in establishing permanent barter, Moscow allowed the Kalmyks free movement and met them half-way, asking in return only citizenship. The aggravation of relations with the Nogai Tatars and the Crimean khanate promoted the settlement of Kalmyks on the southern frontier expanses of Russia.[27]

The oaths of fealty and treaties of 1655, 1657 and 1661 legally formalized the completion of the process of the Kalmyks' voluntary entry into the make-up of Russia. To the Kalmyks were allotted the half-empty steppe expanse along the Yaik (Ural) river, on both sides of the Volga – from Astrakhan to Tsarytsyn and Samara – and the Don steppes. A second condition was free trade in the local markets. The Kalmyk lords took upon themselves the obligation to perform military service on behalf of the Russian state.[28]

The Kalmyk khanate lasted for about 100 years, with its heyday in the period of government by Ayuka Khan (1669–1724). Peter the Great himself came to the Volga specially for a personal meeting with Ayuka Khan, in order to enlist the support of Kalmyk forces in the Persian campaign. Ayuka was the first Kalmyk khan to be confirmed in his title by the Dalai Lama. The charisma of Ayuka enabled him to maintain authority and order on the Kalmyk steppe and to regulate external political relations with Jungaria, Mongolia, China and Tibet. These years confirmed the reputation of Kalmyk weaponry in Russia's wars against such old enemies as Turkey and Sweden. The Kalmyk cavalry played a not inconsequential role in the composition of the Russian regular army in the Northern war, the Azov and Persian campaigns and the interminable Russo-Turkish wars. In 1724 Ayuka Khan died. Immediately four pretenders aspired to his throne, and behind each of them stood a party of Kalmyk feudal lords.[29] The Russian government, as might be expected, was not going to grant the choice of a khan to the will of the Kalmyk *noyon*s.

The abolition of the Kalmyk khanate

In the middle of the eighteenth century there arose a serious economic and political crisis, which had evoked a desire in the Kalmyk rulers to leave their

Russian citizenship and return to Western Mongolia. As a result of this crisis an exodus took place in 1771. A policy of Christianization of the Kalmyk population and of colonization of the Kalmyk steppe by southern Russian peasants, and also a limitation of internal political plenary powers within the khanate, provoked discontent in the Kalmyk nobility. The idea of returning to Jungaria had taken shape and it came to the fore every time either the khan or a *noyon* in the Volga region met with failure in the realization of his plans. A role was also played by the stance of the Buddhist lamas, who from time to time conferred not only their blessings but also their advice to follow the faith of their fathers and grandfathers and to be reunited with their co-religionists in Jungaria. Representatives of the Emperor of China were working in this direction too.[30] A mood in favour of breaking camp and migrating away was particularly strong in 1745 and 1747, but in those years this idea was not supported by the majority of *noyon*s. A quarter of a century later the situation changed. In 1758 the Jungar khanate ceased to exist. A majority of the leaders decided that a return migration to the territory of Jungaria would improve their circumstances, allow the preservation of an autonomous khanate, guarantee their feudal rights and privileges and give them an unrestricted and rich life. The one who made up his mind to put this plan into action was the governor-general of the khanate, Ubushi the son of Khan Donduk-Dashi, who in 1762 had been appointed to this post at the age of eighteen. He had several influential rivals for the khan's throne and was not certain that he would be confirmed as khan. The atmosphere was heated by rumours about the imminent total Christianization of the Kalmyks. Hence a plot arose, which thickened over several years. Historical documents have handed down the fears of the Kalmyk nobility, which were formulated by an anonymous author appealing to the *noyon*s: 'Russian officials have treated you terribly and the government wants to make ploughmen out of you. Look at how the banks of the Ural and Volga are covered with Cossack outposts, and the northern outskirts of our steppe are settled by Germans! In next to no time they'll have occupied the Don, Terek and Kuma, and will be hemming you in on the arid stretches and ruining your herds, the sole source of your existence . . . Your state is obvious to you now, and in the future there'll be left only one of two situations: either to take on yourselves the yoke of slavery or else withdraw from Russia and thereby put an end to such a disaster. It's well known that the Dalai Lama himself indicated two years in which it is possible to carry out the crossing over to Jungaria. These two years have now begun.'[31]

In the winter of 1770–1 the Kalmyks were divided by the Volga into two unequal parts. The larger half was located on the left, where the Torgut *noyon*s nomadized, and on the right were the Khosheut and Derbet *noyon*s. On 4 January 1771 Ubushi announced the decision to leave Russia with the aim of preserving the Kalmyk people. It is reckoned that 30,909 tents with

their wagons set off together with Ubushi and 11,198 tents were left in Russia at the Volga, because that year the winter was mild, with little snow, and for a long time the Volga was not covered with ice.[32] Therefore many nomadizing groups were unable to cross over and the remainder did not stop to wait for them. On the way to Jungaria there was a long convoy of carts, accompanied by a large quantity of livestock, but often they were subjected to attacks by Russian troops and Kazakh raiders. Along the way were left behind one hundred thousand people who had been killed or captured, or who had perished from cold and hunger.[33]

The exodus of 1771 has remained as a tragic page in the history of the Kalmyk people. The great Russian poet Sergei Yesenin wrote about it as follows:

> Didn't you dream about the wagons creaking?
> Last night at the liquid sunrise
> Thirty thousand Kalmyk wagons
> From Samara have crawled to Irgis.
> From Russian bureaucratic bondage,
> Because they were being plucked like partridges
> On our meadows,
> They've stretched themselves to Mongolia
> As a herd of wooden tortoises.[34]

In Jungaria the Kalmyks were met by Qing forces and officials who compelled them to take on Chinese citizenship. The Chinese administration separated the Kalmyks into parts and settled them in different locations in Xinjiang province, formed on the territory of the former Jungar khanate. 'On the fate of the Kalmyks who had fled from the Volga', commented B. V. Dolbezhev, 'from a formerly wide autonomy, from liberty, from a right to territorial inviolability, there remained nothing but country bumpkins. The princes keep silent, the people passively submit, but, while submitting, invariably remember that they came back to China from Russia, from where they formerly fled to protect their independence and freedom. It was this liberty and independence that they lost irretrievably, instead of keeping it, and now all that remain to them are traditions about it. They regret their flight and with bitter irony evaluate the results of their risky step in a widely known Torgut proverb that says: "We had fetters of rope – we exchanged them for iron ones".'[35]

In the opinion of M. Khodarkovsky, the exodus of 1771 was a natural result of the relationships of two peoples, Russian and Kalmyk, who were like two states that could not live in friendship, since they represented two different worlds – settled and nomadic, Christian and Buddhist, large and small – who, even if they crossed one another's paths, would still be unable to comprehend one another.[36]

After the out-migration from Russia of part of the Kalmyks, Catherine the Great on 19 October 1771 issued a decree on the elimination of the Kalmyk khanate, having at that time abolished the most important titles 'khan' and 'governor-general'. In the absence of a khan's authority, administration of a nomad *ulus* passed to *noyon*s by inheritance from father to son, but under the supervision of Russian bureaucrat-policemen who superintended the proprietors in each *ulus*. In this same year the Tsarist government introduced the so-called 'special department of Kalmyk affairs at the office of the Astrakhan governor', thereby taking a step towards obliterating the remnants of autonomy of the Kalmyk khanate. A series of acts of a legislative character – 'Regulations for administering the Kalmyk people' in 1825, or 'The statute of 23 April 1847' about managing the Kalmyk peoples – were a continuation of a general line of Russian government policy in relation to the Kalmyks. The essence of this system consisted of organizing petty administrative guardianship over the population of each Kalmyk *ulus*. On 16 March 1892 there was passed a law entitled 'On the repeal of obligatory relations between separate classes of the Kalmyk people', which became in essence an abolition of serfdom among the Kalmyk peasantry. The liberation of Kalmyks from feudal dependency had the character of a redemption fee, the size of which corresponded to an amount five times that of one's annual payments.

The Kalmyk autonomous republic within the make-up of the USSR

After the 1917 revolution, by a decree of the Council of People's Commissars, Kalmykia came into the composition of the Russian Federation from 2 November 1920 as the Kalmyk People's Autonomous Region (*oblast'*), but in 1935 it was reorganized into an autonomous republic with Elista as its capital. In these pre-war years practically all the Kalmyks crossed over from a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life to a settled one. Party and Soviet organs imparted an exceptionally important significance to the Kalmyks' transition to a settled lifestyle, as the main issue in the reorganization of their economy and way of life. For example, the second general Kalmyk congress of soviets, which took place in 1921, adopted the following resolution: 'To strive in every way towards the actual implementation in life of the resolution by the Central Executive Committee on the approach of the Kalmyk people to a settled life by means of the grouping of separate residence units (*khoton*s) into permanent settlements of no fewer than fifty tents.'[37]

The transition to a settled lifestyle was connected with the carrying out of tasks for organizing the use of land on the Kalmyk steppe. In 1924 a special department for organizing land use and regulating land tenure was created in the Kalmyk autonomous region. Members of the department indicated the following reasons for the Kalmyks' mass transition to a settled way of life:

1 A shift to a sedentary mode of living, connected with the production of a stockpile of winter fodder.
2 A weakening of livestock breeding in general and in particular a significant reduction in households with large herds.
3 The introduction into the economy of subsidiary branches, such as agriculture, cattle rearing and market gardening.
4 An increasing significance of seasonal and local trades and of handicraft occupations for households without herds or with little livestock.
5 The expensive price of felt tents in comparison with the construction of wooden or daubed brick cottages.[38]

The transition to a settled way of life gradually led to all Kalmyks beginning to live in stationary dwellings and in fixed settlements, which in turn brought about changes to the usual forms of managing the household economy. These changes took place in the first instance in the sphere of animal husbandry, which more and more acquired the form of keeping cattle in stalls. One of the motives for aspiring towards the mastery of new forms of economic activity by the Kalmyks was a fear of mass starvation, which in 1922 struck the Volga region and the territory of Kalmykia. In the report of the Kalmyk Central Executive Committee presented in May 1923 to the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee, it was stated that 'after the hunger of 1922 the Kalmyks zealously got down to farming, collectivization is developing among them and they have begun to move across *en masse* to a settled mode of existence'.[39]

The most outstanding events in the cultural sphere at that time were the regional Olympiad of amateur art (1935), the creation of a professional Kalmyk theatre and the celebration of the 500-year jubilee of the Kalmyk folk epic 'Jangar' (1940). Although the epic, based on oral tradition, has no definite date, the age of the epic equates with definite historical events in Kalmyk history, topically corresponding to the epic's content.

This became possible because in those years a practice arose in the USSR of conducting all-union celebrations in the national republics in honour of the jubilees of the epic productions of different peoples. These cultural occasions had to demonstrate the flourishing of national culture under Soviet power and divert attention away from the systematic annihilation of the old national intelligentsia in the process of the creation of a culture that was 'national in form and socialist in content'. The widely celebrated jubilees of 'The knight in a tigerskin' and 'David Sassoon' gave the opportunity to hold a festival of Kalmyk culture. In the organizers' designs, the festival had to show how much Soviet power had brought to Kalmyk culture. As a result, the Kalmyks' first professional theatrical company performed at the festival.

One of the first productions of the Kalmyk professional theatre was the play *Ulan Sar* (*Red Month*), called thus as a counterbalance to the traditional festival *Tsagan Sar* (*White Month*). It was typical for Communist

ideology to try to accentuate values in folklore and literature in accordance with a class approach, finding something negative in everything connected with the former – exploitative – social order. Hence, in the first edition of an anthology of Kalmyk folklore a section on curses was crossed out as the editors reckoned that in the Soviet period curses were anachronistic and were not in accord with the social optimism of the times. The songs' texts were altered too. For example, in one of the folk songs there were the words 'we go to the festival to show off our old clothes', the reference to 'old clothes' intending to mean in particular those expensive clothes that had been carefully preserved and handed on as an inheritance. In the new editing of this song the adjective 'old' was replaced by 'new', altering the whole idea of the song but imparting to it a content in keeping with Communist ideals.

On 22 June 1941 the Soviet Union was drawn into the Second World War. In addition to the systematic mobilization of the adult male population into the Red Army, along with volunteers, an idea arose in the minds of the Party *nomenklatura* (privileged class) to organize two Kalmyk national cavalry divisions. In itself the idea was profoundly mistaken, as the merits of cavalry were insignificant in comparison with the military technology of their adversaries. Apart from that, the number of adult males in the population of the Kalmyk people was insufficient to provide the full complement of two divisions. Despite all the efforts put into the realization of this idea, only one division – the 110th Special Kalmyk Cavalry Division – was formed. Brought up to strength in January 1942 after a short-term training of new recruits, the 110th Division took part in fighting for the Don and the northern Caucasus and in the battle of Stalingrad.

On 27 December 1943 by a decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR the Kalmyk autonomous republic was abolished and the people deported from their places of residence. A separate chapter is devoted to this tragic period in the history of the Kalmyk people, in the course of which a third of the nation was lost.

The autonomy of Kalmykia as an *oblast'* was restored on 9 January 1957, and in 1958 Kalmykia again became a fully fledged autonomous republic within the USSR. The Kalmyks' return from deportation is closely connected in the national consciousness with the name of Nikita Khrushchev and his struggle against Stalin's cult of personality and its consequences. Khrushchev even today is considered to be the 'saviour of the nation'. The Kalmyks' gratitude to Khrushchev is so great right up to the present time that recently one of the streets of Elista was named after him. Characteristic of those years was an incident like the following. An old Kalmyk lady, living in a rural part of the republic at the beginning of the 1960s, was praying not to a Buddhist image (*burkhan*) but to a portrait of Khrushchev. Finding himself a witness to this, the poet David Kugul'tinov asked her, 'What are you doing, and why? After all, he's but a man, and not God.' The old lady replied, 'I pray to him because he could do that which the gods were unable to do.'

The Kalmyk Republic

In 1990 the Kalmyk ASSR proclaimed state sovereignty. In accord with its new status, the Republic of Kalmykia has its own state flag, hymn and emblem. The state flag consists of a yellow-coloured rectangular panel, within which, in a blue circle, is depicted a white lotus. The symbolism of the colours is that traditionally white – the sacred colour of shamanism – signified purity and holiness, blue was the colour of the eternal heavens and yellow was the colour of yellow-capped Buddhism. Likewise, the lotus is a Buddhist symbol, indeed one of the most widespread features of Buddhism. The state emblem of the Kalmyk Republic is also full of traditional symbolism. In pride of place is a red tassel – the ethnolinguistic sign on the headgear of the Oirat-Kalmyks – surrounded by lotuses. Four interlocking circles at the top of the emblem represent the union 'of four Oirat tribes', which testifies to a continuity of historical forms of statehood with the present.

The Code of the Steppe

In the Code of the Steppe, which is the basic law of the Kalmyk Republic, article one announces: 'The Republic of Kalmykia is a subject of the Russian Federation, enjoying equal rights, is a component, inseparable part of it, and performs its activities in full accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation, with the Code of the Steppe (Basic Law) of the Republic of Kalmykia and also with other legislation of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kalmykia.' In the Code of the Steppe, the adoption of which in 1994 was accompanied by social debates, for the first time in the constitutional documents of subjects of the Russian Federation any exit mechanism for leaving the Russian Federation was excluded. In 1995 the post of Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Kalmyk Republic was instituted.

At the present time the Republic of Kalmykia is a republic with a presidential form of government. All important questions in the life of the republic are decided personally by the president, K. Ilyumzhinov. According to the Code of the Steppe (Article 25), the head of the republic and the highest public servant is the President of the Republic of Kalmykia. Eligible to stand for election as president is any citizen of the Russian Federation of an age from 30 to 60 years who has been resident in the republic for not less than one year prior to the election and who speaks both of the official languages of the republic, Kalmyk and Russian. In fact no one has tested candidates' real knowledge. For presidential elections to take place after the amendments of 1995, it became sufficient to receive 15 per cent of the votes of the electorate. The President of the Kalmyk Republic, being head of the republic's executive power – which is part of the unified system of executive power of the Russian Federation – determines the structure of the organs of executive power.

Kalmykia's president was elected by the citizens of Kalmykia for a term of five years and in 1995 this period was lengthened to seven years on the basis of equal, direct and universal suffrage in secret ballots. The president is inviolable, and the institution of the president is unshakable. His plenary powers cannot be used to the detriment of the people of the Kalmyk Republic (Article 26). According to the Code of the Steppe, in the case of a violation by the president of the Code of the Steppe and of the oath given by him, the People's Khural (Parliament) of the Kalmyk Republic, taking into account the opinion of the Kalmyk Republic's High Court, expresses its lack of confidence in the president and the question of his removal is submitted to a general referendum. A decision about an appeal to the High Court to give a verdict on the lack of confidence and on the taking of a referendum requires no fewer than two-thirds of the votes from the overall number of deputies of the People's Khural.

At any time the President of the Kalmyk Republic can tender his resignation, which is received by the People's Khural of Kalmykia. If the president for this or other reasons is unable to fulfil his duties, his plenary powers are transferred, until the election of a new president, to the Vice-President of the Republic, or, if this is not possible, to the Speaker of Parliament.

In 1995 the legislative assembly of Kalmykia extended the president's authority to a term of seven years. However, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov preferred to go for a second election in order to secure the people's support. On 15 October 1995 presidential elections took place ahead of schedule and 85 per cent of those who participated in elections without an alternative candidate gave their vote to the first president of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. In such a manner his powers were extended until the year 2002. In October 2002 Kirsan Ilyumzhinov was again elected as president for a third term.

The Kalmyk Republic is divided into thirteen districts plus the city of Elista (in the capacity of an independent administrative unit, as the republic's capital). In the districts and Elista representative organs of local self-government are absent. All the fullness of state power is concentrated in the hands of the executive structures in the person of the representative of the President of Kalmykia and his apparatus. The priority of the executive authorities in the republic is evident.

The highest representative and legislative organ of authority in the republic is the People's Khural (Parliament), consisting of twenty-seven deputies. Deputies of the People's Khural are elected for a term of four years on the basis of direct, equal and general suffrage in secret ballots. According to the law 'On the election of deputies to the People's Khural', the right to nominate candidates is possessed by political parties, social organizations and movements operating in the territory of Kalmykia, branches of general Federation-level parties and citizens' groups organized by place of residence or work and numbering no fewer than seventy people. Self-nominated citizens are permitted but in this case the registration of candidates requires, along with the nomination, the submission of a list of 10 per cent of the region's

Figure 1.1 The Elista 'White House' of the president's administration and the government of Kalmykia. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

voters by whom they are proposed. On registration a candidate is obliged to put forward an electoral deposit amounting to one hundred times the size of the minimum wage. On the territory of the republic there are eighteen single-mandate constituencies and one that is polymandatory, in which the President of Kalmykia proposes nine of his own candidates. This was created so that Parliament would not be mono-ethnic: the possibility of it becoming so arises from the way in which residents of the republic, especially in rural areas, are inclined to support candidates of their own nationality. Another reason for this system is the danger that women, who would not run for political election in competition with men, would not be represented in the composition of the parliament. Although K. Ilyumzhinov in his pre-electoral programme in 1993 promised the creation of a professional parliament, in 1994 the People's Khural was not professional for financial reasons, just as a professional parliament did not come into being in other constituent regions of the Russian Federation.

Having felt the necessity for an ideology in uniting the people, in September 1996 K. Ilyumzhinov signed a decree 'On state support for the study and mastery of Jangar, the Kalmyk national epic'. This decree set the beginning of a Jangar state programme, the aim of which is the preservation and

further propagation of the Jangar epic, since the Jangariad is 'a wonderful expression of the people's spirit and aspirations, and is steeped in the idea of the unity and well-being of the nation'. The programme also includes a complex of measures of both an organized scientific-practical nature and a mass-cultural character.

2 Deportation as a collective trauma

Thirteen years, thirteen days

In 1952 Eza Kalyayeva, a sixteen-year-old girl living in Moscow, had to apply for a passport. The police official read through her form, on which it was written that her mother was Jewish, and asked, 'Young lady, don't you have another nationality – a better one?' However, she could not name the nationality of her father, a Kalmyk: had she done so, she would have been rapidly sent off into exile.

Nomadism as a means of livelihood for the Kalmyks has occasionally been involuntary. One might think that it should have been easy for the Kalmyks, who in the past were a nomadic people, to endure a forced resettlement – as if it were a routine migration. However, by the time of their deportation the Kalmyks were no longer nomads, while all their previous shifts in location, connected with the annual cycle of their economy, were carefully planned in time and space. Hence the coerced 'migration' had nothing in common with their previous experience.

The deportation of 1943 has become the gravest tragedy in the history of the Kalmyk people. Over the course of several decades right up to the end of the 1980s, all kinds of recollections of the deportation among the Kalmyk people were forbidden. The people's history had a blank spot: it was as if the time from 28 December 1943 to 1956 had been cut out. Not only official scholarship but also common parlance was bounded by the memories of 'before Siberia' and 'after Siberia'. Representatives of the older generation of Kalmyks formulated it in a more traditional manner: 'before the migration' and 'after the migration'.

Nowadays many facts of the Stalinist period seem unbelievable to us. For those who witnessed those years, however, the burdens of that time have been their life, their history and the stories of their nearest and dearest.

In the 1920s and 1930s the peoples of the USSR were building a socialist society. According to a concept firmly held by Stalin, the fight against class enemies had to accelerate in proportion to the degree of advancement towards a socially equitable society. For the sake of constructing a socialist society, scapegoats were made of numerous representatives of layers of the

population branded as class exploiters: the so-called 'former' landowners, capitalists, gentry, clergy, intelligentsia, *kulaks* (richer peasants), bourgeois nationalists and even communists themselves who had belonged in the past to different streams of the party. In the course of time whole groups of people began to be accused of 'betraying the Motherland' and separate national entities – districts, regions, republics – began to vanish from the map of the Soviet Union.[1]

The Kalmyks were among fourteen ethnic groups 'punished' by Stalin. It is difficult to imagine now, but the repressions of several nationalities were timed to coincide with state festivals: the Balkar people were exiled on 8 March, International Women's Day, and the Chechen and Ingush on 23 February, the Day of the Soviet Army and Navy. The Kalmyks' exile was a present 'to the father of the peoples' for New Year 1944.

The abolition of statehood

On 27 December 1943 M. I. Kalinin signed decree number 115/144 of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, entitled 'On the liquidation of the Kalmyk ASSR and the formation of the Astrakhan oblast within the composition of the USSR'. The accusatory part of the decree formulates the 'basis' of the punishment: 'in the period of occupation of the territory of the Kalmyk ASSR by German-Fascist invaders, many Kalmyks betrayed their Motherland, joined military detachments organized by the Germans for fighting against the Red Army, handed over to the Germans honest Soviet citizens, seized and handed over to the Germans livestock evacuated from collective farms in the Rostov oblast and the Ukraine, and, after the expulsion of the invaders by the Red Army, organized bands and actively opposed organs of Soviet power in the restoration of the economy destroyed by the Germans, perpetrated bandit raids on collective farms and terrorized the surrounding population.'[2]

The decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR ordained that all Kalmyks residing on the territory of the Kalmyk ASSR were to be moved to other regions of the USSR and the Kalmyk ASSR was to be liquidated. Elsewhere in the edict it was decided to divide the territory of the Kalmyk ASSR between the just created Astrakhan province, Stalingrad province and the Stravrapol region.[3] This edict was not published, and neither was resolution number 1432–425 of the Soviet of People's Commissars, adopted on 28 December 1943 and signed by V. M. Molotov, in which the fate of the deported nation was determined. In accordance with the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, all Kalmyks living in the Kalmyk ASSR were evacuated to the Altai and Krasnoyarsk regions and to the provinces of Omsk and Novosibirsk. Among them, 25,000 people went to the Altai region, another 25,000 to the Krasnoyarsk region, a further 25,000 to the Omsk region and 20,000 to that of Novosibirsk. For the most part the resettlement of the Kalmyks was carried out in villages where the economy was based on animal husbandry or fishing.[4]

The eviction of the nation

The operation to evict the Kalmyks was called 'Ulusy', the word 'ulus' (meaning in Kalmyk 'a people group') in this case being a term used in spoken contexts. In all about 120,000 Kalmyks were subjected to deportation: on 28 December 1943 all inhabitants of the Kalmyk ASSR 'of Kalmyk nationality' were loaded on to goods wagons heading in an easterly direction. 'In the period of the first special trains' 91,919 Kalmyks were taken out. At a later date Kalmyks residing in the Rostov and Stalingrad regions were deported too. On 4 January 1944 Lavrentiy Beria personally testified to the State Defence Committee 'to comrade I. V. Stalin and to comrade V. M. Molotov' that 'in all 26,359 families or 93,139 persons were loaded on to 46 special trains'.[5] The NKVD (*Narodniy Kommissariat Vnutrennikh del*, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) and NKGB (*Narodniy Kommissariat Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, the People's Commissariat of State Security) of the USSR despatched to the Kalmyk ASSR 2975 officers to safeguard operation 'Ulusy', and the Transport Directorate provided 1255 motor vehicles with the necessary fuel and oil for transportation. The operation was carried out by the third motorized rifle regiment of the internal troops of the NKVD (1226 people), who had experience in taking part in similar punitive actions against the Karachai people.[6]

On 28 December soldiers of the Soviet Army went to each Kalmyk home. They gave women, children and old people half an hour to two hours to assemble. With them they brought warm clothes, food or religious images; some people brought what was the most valuable item in those times – a Singer sewing machine. Right up to the present time stories of how they set off for Siberia are kept alive in Kalmyk families:

> When the soldiers came to our house and ordered us to muster, granny dropped to her knees in front of the chest in which were kept all the most important things, knelt and took out the men's silver belts. When the soldier saw them, he shot a round from his sub-machine gun above granny's head. She was so terrified that she didn't get up from her knees any more and even left the house like that on all fours.
>
> The soldiers left, but Mum burst into tears, crying bitterly, 'where will they take us to? For what?' Then she composed herself and, as I remember, straight away put three dresses on me, packed two suitcases and again began to cry.[7]
>
> When they evicted us, I thought that they'd take us out of the town and shoot us, just like the Germans shot the Jews, but it turned out differently – a living torture.[8]

The route to Siberia remains the most terrible of people's memories. Trucks were used to collect people by households and then take them off to the

nearest railway station. There all were loaded into goods wagons that had usually been used for transporting livestock. In such wagons were accommodated sixty to eighty people, and for all of them there was one small stove that was lit from time to time. One could not warm up because of the cracks in the walls and floor of the wagons, but on the stove it was possible to cook some food. Such a wagon had no provision for any kind of conveniences.

> Forty-eight old people, women and children were loaded into a 'cattle' wagon and the wheels began to rumble. We hadn't managed to bring anything warm, and had only enough food for three or four days . . . The crowded wagon became more spacious – on account of people who had departed from this life.[9]

> Travelling in our wagon were mainly women; there were two men – an old grandfather and me – and that was when I was fourteen years old. At every stop I had to find water for all my fellow travellers. But as our food was of such bad quality, a lot of the women began to have upset stomachs. There was no provision for any toilets on this train, and the old people asked me to help them alight from the high wagon so that they could find somewhere to relieve themselves at the station. While I was helping them to climb out, and then to drag them back, the train started off and I didn't manage to stock up with water. The old man really swore at me and ordered me at the next stop to steal an axe from somewhere. I managed to do this, and the grandfather cut out an aperture in the corner of the wagon, instructing the old ladies to make use of it.[10]

The difficult journey to the eastern regions of the country lasted for two to three weeks. People died of hunger, cold and illness. At each stop the soldier-guards peeped into the wagons with the question, 'Are there any dead?' For the corpses they allotted a special wagon at the end of the train, but when that also became over-filled they simply threw out the dead bodies at the stops. Their relatives could do nothing but say a quick prayer over the dead bodies.

Several months later the officers and soldiers who had been at the front lines were recalled. They were collected together in a labour camp at Polovinka station near to the town of Molotov (nowadays called Perm) and mobilized to construct the Shirokovsk hydro-electric station.

> After hard, exhausting work, emaciated from a poor diet, people at times were unable to climb up the hill but fell down and died on the road, not reaching the wooden barrack huts. We couldn't understand what we were fed with: no soup, no broth, so we called this 'soup' by a slang term (*balanda*) for 'foul soup' as they poured us, for four people, one basin which had floating in it four salty tomatoes and nothing else . . . Those who couldn't work at all were passed through a medical committee. The doctors only examined the buttocks and if nothing was

> revealed except skin and bone they drew up a certificate to document the person's unsuitability for further work, and they let him have his freedom . . . They told the person to go to his relatives' place of residence, where they had been exiled to. For the journey they gave some dry rations: one roll of bread and a single herring. The hungry, emaciated fellow, after getting the rations in his hands, immediately devoured the bread and herring, and then almost without stopping drank the unboiled water. That's why one of them died without reaching the railway station and the rest of them on the journey.[11]

By 1 May 1944 the so-called 'cleansing' of the former territory of the republic had been carried out, 400 representatives of the Kalmyk nation had been discovered and deported and later, in 1945–8, a further 190 people had been unearthed and evicted. At this same time Kalmyks living in Moscow and other cities of the USSR were also exiled. Despite all the injustice and cruelty in the Kalmyks' situation, the majority of military officers and soldiers tried to show their innocence and remained loyal to Stalin and faithful to communist ideas:

> On top of all the suffering was mixed in the insult that we, soldiers and frontliners, were held behind barbed wire – like criminals, or German captives, or members of Vlasov's army (who were regarded by the Soviets as traitors).[12]

> I come to the barrack hut, and there I see Pyurva, a living skeleton, at first glance: it was as if his heart was beating feverishly through his ribs. Weakly he called me: 'Go, and pay for me my party membership subscription' . . . Three days later he passed away.[13]

For former officers of the Soviet Army, victories on the front line became protests against the repression. 'So great was our faith in the sacred business of defending our Motherland that Kalmyk fighters ran away from Shiroklag to the front line, but they were caught on the railway purely by their outward appearance.'[14]

Popular rumour relates examples of officers who, after running away from the camp, passed themselves off as Kazakhs who had become separated from their own corps. When they had fought out the rest of the war until the final victory, the Kalmyks returned to their families in Siberia. In March 1945, 'We were told that there was an instruction from above to set free in the first instance those with medals and those of the youngest age, soldiers born in 1925–6.'[15]

Life in conditions of deportation

Perceived anthropologically, the Kalmyks' deportation started from the moment they were initially excluded from Soviet society, and almost

immediately also cut off from association with other human beings. In the memories of the majority of people this is associated with words such as 'cattle wagons', 'cattle fodder', 'inhuman conditions' or 'corpses of the dead'. The word 'cannibals' must have been reinforced by the practice of exclusion from the ranks of human beings. The first steps, then, in the Kalmyks' adaptation to their new locations began when 'the Siberian people saw us as human beings'.

How the Kalmyks lived in their new settlement is recalled by a Siberian woman, an inhabitant of Kornilovo village in the territory of Krasnoyarsk:

> In the winter of 1944 fifty to sixty families of Kalmyk nationality were brought to our village. From cold and hunger they died out as whole families. They couldn't dig out graves for the dead, so they often left them under snowdrifts. In the spring the winds carried the jet-black tresses around the village and the remains of the dead were left in view. After some time only one Kalmyk family was left.[16]

How could the Kalmyks survive in such inhuman conditions? As remembered fifty years later, many 'ate potato peel – yes – and even ate carrion from the livestock burial grounds; it all happened'.[17]

> The town to which we were taken was called Aral'sk. We lived within several steps of the sea . . . The sea fed us with fish. We even ate the fish waste products thrown out from the processing plant. That's exactly how we and our other fellow-countrymen lived.[18]

> It was chance that saved us from death. We were fed on a foul soup of putrid fish. You had to chop off the rotten heads and pick out the rest for 'soup'. For some time we did such work and our strength picked up.[19]

> Those who had remained lived on until the spring of 1944, using birch bark for food, but when they began to plough the ground we went behind the plough and gathered frozen potatoes too.[20]

Kalmyks who arrived in some places in Siberia were accompanied by rumours that they were cannibals. There were occasions when the exiles were put up for a night in a single barrack hut and the local residents, to save themselves from the cannibals, boarded up the door and set fire to living people.

Turning up in new places of residence, often not knowing the Russian language well, not having any specialist skills that could be put to use in the new conditions, the Kalmyks were unable to find work, and indeed no one wanted to take them on straight away. Starving people were obliged to steal livestock, which they were able to handle skillfully. Although the Kalmyks also removed all footprints after them without leaving a trace, the culprit was nevertheless found once they had eaten the stolen animal. Often in such

situations the children were asked what they had eaten yesterday. As the naive children replied honestly, it was impossible to escape arrest. Later it became clear, however, that only one person was arrested each time. The wretched situation of the Kalmyk arrivals continued; it was difficult to find work but it was imperative to feed the family or they would all perish from starvation. Often the Kalmyks had no alternative but to repeat the theft of livestock. They found a solution in this way: the weakest and sickest people, whose likelihood of survival was practically nil, were prepared to take the blame on themselves after discussing beforehand who among the survivors would take responsibility for bringing up their children and grandchildren. This is why so often in the years of exile near and distant relatives lived together, and in one family there were people with several different surnames.

Even state officials wrote about the terrible conditions in which the Kalmyks had to take shelter. G. S. Zavgorodniy, the Uzbek SSR's vice-minister of internal affairs, reported that 'the specially resettled Kalmyks have been living in unsanitary conditions, with an absence of shoes, bedding, personal garden plots and so on'.[21] As pointed out in one of the despatches from the Novosibirsk region, 148 people were accommodated in a barrack hut at the Timiryazevskiy mechanical centre with a living space of 34 square metres, where there was not even 0.3 square metres for each tenant. People were accommodated in bunks with two or three tiers, and 131 people were living in another such lodging with an area of 28 square metres.[22]

Torn away from their traditional way of life, robbed and disenfranchised from their civil and political rights, and doomed to slave labour, in the bleak conditions of Siberia the Kalmyks were on the verge of total extinction. I shall cite another testimony of a functionary who, working for the department of internal affairs in those years, evidently had to be used to the most terrible things. In the report of the head of Novosibirsk province's UMVD department for special resettlement he wrote, on 10 July 1946:

> The mortality rate among the Kalmyks is really high. From the moment of eviction and up to 6 April 1946, 14,343 people, or 15 per cent of the contingent which had arrived in Siberia, died . . . Now mortality among the Kalmyks exceeds the birth rate by 3.5 times, even though there were no epidemic illnesses among this population . . . The birth rate has been negligible. Up to 1 June 1946 only 297 children were born in Kalmyk families – that is, nine times fewer than the Kalmyks who died in this period. Among the indigenous population of the region the birth rate in this period was double the mortality rate.[23]

Many women who were at a fertile age while in Siberia have related how their first children born there were stillborn or unable to survive. A woman who had given birth to three children and lost them as each one passed away, finally gave birth to healthy ones who survived. In 1948–9 there were

3193 infants born in Kalmyk families, of whom 2766 died; in 1949, there were 2058 born and 1903 who died.[24] Incidentally, a similar situation regarding child mortality was experienced when the Kalmyks returned from exile to their native land: 'Times were hard, hungry. Only the strongest survived. We buried four of my brothers. Each family lost someone from among their nearest and dearest. Outside the town the Kalmyk cemetery was growing.'[25]

A dispersed resettlement, in regions differing from their own in terms of ecology, economic traditions and religious affiliation, along with their distinguishing phenotype, deprivation and the accusation of treason, excluded people from society. In order to survive, and then to get into the local community, the Kalmyks had to learn Russian well, acquire new economic skills and confine to the private sphere all their own ethnic coloration in life. The ethnonym 'Kalmyk' was prohibited in social discourse. Ethnicity took on a stigmatized character. A stigmatized ethnicity, in association with a phenotype foreign to the dominant society, induced the ethnic group, both at the time of their deprivations and also in the post-traumatic period, to reject the clearest markers of their ethnic culture: personal names, the language of social intercourse, demonstrations of religiosity and national festivals.

The Kalmyks' material and nutritional state in the new places where they had been resettled was catastrophic. Hence the deputy chief of the management of the NKVD for the Omsk region wrote to L. Beriya: 'In connection with the exceptionally meagre provision of rations, cases of distended bellies owing to starvation of the Kalmyk settlers have taken on a mass character.'[26] Even in the official documents of departments of internal affairs, factors in the high mortality rate were noted to be 'the complete maladjustment to the severe climate, their not being used to the conditions and ignorance of the language'.[27] It is impossible to read without a shudder the recently published documents of those years about the life of the deportees, regarding the scandalous facts that are stated in the dry language of official documents:

> Discharged from hospital after contracting typhus, Khalga Boldyrev was released from work after his illness. Korzyn', the assistant head of the mechanical forestry centre, deprived him, together with his aged mother, Ol'zet Boldyreva, 64 years old, of bread vouchers and the right to use the canteen, in connection with which nine days later Boldyreva died from emaciation. Similar cases are not isolated.[28]

In this manner the Kalmyks ended up resettled in the most varied corners of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of 1944, there were 6167 families in the Altai region, 7525 in the Krasnoyarsk territory, 5435 in Novosibirsk province, 8353 in the Omsk region, 660 in the area of Tomsk and 648 in Kazakhstan. Kalmyks were also settled in northern districts: 522 families

in the Tobolsk area, 2796 in the Yamalo-Nenets region and 1760 in the Khanty-Mansi region.[29] Reckoned to be the lucky ones were those who found themselves deported to Kyrgyzia or Kazakhstan, where the indigenous population was closer to their physical appearance and the climate considerably warmer.

In this period the Kalmyks had to take up occupations that were novel to them, as the new ecological niche could not guarantee a continuity of their traditional economic pursuits. Out of an overall total of 45,985 Kalmyk settlers counted for work in various branches of the national economy, 28,107 were in agriculture, 1632 in mining and gold extraction industries, 784 in coal mining, 259 in paper and timber processing industries and 8608 in miscellaneous other enterprises.[30]

Women who had hitherto not been engaged in any kind of work outside the home had to go tree felling. Alongside this, those of them who had brought sewing machines worked on the side on individual orders for sewing clothes, because 'Siberian women just couldn't sew especially well, you know.'

Of all economic occupations, fishing was the only one that proved to be useful in their new ecological niche. More than 3000 families of fishermen were resettled in areas with a fishing industry: 2100 families in the Krasnoyarsk fishing group and 900 families in the Taimyr one. Work was found for the Kalmyks in fishing collectives in other regions to which they had been deported.

Many Kalmyks who had been steppe dwellers gained their first experience of gardening in Siberia. Of course, in hungry times they had no choice and the Kalmyks learned from their neighbours the necessary horticultural knowledge and skills. On the other hand, they were assisted in this by a state decision to support people dying from hunger and by a campaign being conducted 'on the necessity to be engaged in cultivation of one's allotments on the assigned plots of land. So, in the Novosibirsk region alone 575 hectares of land were tilled in 1945 and 777 hectares in 1946.'[31]

The new conditions of life changed the Kalmyks' diet, which could no longer remain based on milk and meat. Potatoes came into the ration as a staple food and many Kalmyks began to eat fish, gruel and soups made from cabbage, or else from cabbage and beetroot. Sauerkraut, pickled gherkins and Siberian *pelmeny* (meat-filled 'dumplings') came into the daily menu of Kalmyk families and remain there to the present day. Families deported to Central Asia and Kazakhstan learned to eat the local foods there: pilaff and manty ('steamed dumplings' larger than *pelmeny* but also stuffed with meat or other foods).

Among the Kalmyk deportees were 201 specialists with higher education. Often in the places of resettlement they turned out to be the only highly qualified professionals, and in the absence of local colleagues they were trusted with responsible work. Many Kalmyks became teachers of middle and eight-year schools in the depths of Siberia. As a teacher in a school of the Ust-Abakan district remembers, 'I had to teach mainly children of those

who had been specially resettled: Germans and those from the Baltic States, Western Ukraine and Belorussia.'[32]

It occasionally happened that the cultural level of deported Kalmyks was higher than that of the local population:

> The youth on the collective farm were for the most part poorly educated, and there was nothing in the way of a 'cultural centre' . . . After getting to know them I began unobtrusively to steer conversations on to cultural topics – discussions in the street and in daily life . . . With the lads we set up a horizontal beam, swings and 'giant steps', and we laid out a volleyball court. With the teachers I came to an agreement about organizing dances in the school and I also organized a drama club.[33]

The strict regulation of life in the special resettlement localities forbade the Kalmyks from leaving their places of residence without authorization. Anyone guilty of absence without leave from his or her place of residence could be punished by a long term of imprisonment. For a long time the one and only reason regarded as sufficient for moving from one place to another was the reunification of a family. In order to show that a Kalmyk had not run away from the place where he was registered, he needed to visit the local commandant's office for registration each month on an appointed day. This procedure is remembered as most demeaning: 'The most humiliating thing was going each month to sign on at the commandant's office.'[34] 'It was especially . . . needling to one's feelings to show up for registration on 5 December – Stalin's Constitution Day.'[35] Debasement was mixed with fear because almost every visit to the commandant was accompanied by questions about the mood among the Kalmyks. Any innocent answer, as taken in the Jesuit-like manner of the NKVD, could entail the arrest and conviction of innocent people. A thousand children who had been taken to Siberia in infancy received their passports with a lower age than was really the case: later, in the 1980s, a thousand requests were submitted to the state archives of Kalmykia to correct the date of birth, so that these people could retire at the right time and not work several years longer, in accordance with the Siberian alteration of their documents. Probably the Kalmyks deliberately lowered their children's age so as to postpone the time after which their inexperienced children were required to go for registration by themselves. NKVD officers were fully capable of using children's ingenuous answers against their own parents.

For many Kalmyks at that time their exiled status and dispersed settlement hampered opportunities for marriage. Nevertheless, the demographic disproportion of the post-war years and the shortage of Siberian men led to inter-ethnic marriages between Kalmyk men and local Siberian women. Many Kalmyk women whose youth was lived in those baneful years were unable to get married. The story of an acquaintance of my parents is interesting in this context. My father, Matsak Guchinov, a twenty-two-year-old officer in

the Soviet Army, was wounded on the front line, and after hospitalization he was given an early discharge from the army. In December 1943 he was deported from Kalmykia to the town of Kuybyshev in Novosibirsk province. There he made friends with Erdny Zunduyev, my mother's uncle, who told him about his niece. A graduate of the Astrakhan teacher training college, Maria Bal'zirova was at that time working in a fish processing plant in Surgut. She had no chance of getting married because there were few Kalmyks there of a suitable age. My future father sent her an official letter of proposal, as there was no other way that they could meet. At noon Maria arrived at the home of her unknown fiancé, and that very same evening they had the wedding.

I shall cite another family story about the flight from Siberia of our distant relative Sophia Alexeyeva. A graduate of the Moscow teacher training institute, aunt Sophia before the beginning of the war had two young children and a room in Moscow. Her husband, a military doctor, was chief doctor of a medical train. In the summer of 1941 aunt Sophia and her children arrived in Kalmykia, at her mother's, and taught mathematics in a school. When she ended up in Siberia, she had to go to work cutting timber, and a falling log damaged her spine. She recognized that she could not get any qualified help and, even if she were to be hospitalized, her children and old mother, who could not understand Russian, would perish from hunger. They lived not far from a railway and, being desperate, aunt Sophia showed her certification as the wife of a chief doctor to the head of another medical train, which was heading for the front lines via Moscow. The head of the train allowed her to travel to Moscow secretly in a goods wagon as long as they did not catch her. In the case of detection, he would deny that he had given permission. So aunt Sophia returned to Moscow with her children and mother, and began to live in her room. In 1948, a time of the regime's increasing cruelty, agents of the NKVD who were combing the capital came to her. Seeing a sick woman lying on the bed, two little children and an old woman who did not understand Russian, they had no desire to have anything to do with them and left them alone. This story is virtually the one and only happy exception.

For the duration of those thirteen years the majority of deportees had no opportunity to be educated. To acquire an education one had to show brilliant knowledge and only the highest marks on one's certificate. Nevertheless, even in a period when the regime was weakening somewhat, Kalmyks were forbidden from entering higher education establishments specializing in humanities, especially those relating to 'ideological' specialities such as history or philosophy. Practically all those who managed to receive a higher education in those years were specialists in public health or economics. This was subsequently reflected in the disproportionate number of specialists in national economy at the time of the restoration of the republic. Even the achievement of such a goal as receiving an education nevertheless required personal fortitude and purposefulness in a person who had been specially resettled.

> My older brother decided to study at a technical college. He put in an application to his commandant that he greatly desired to study. The commandant tried to talk him out of it and wouldn't allow it, but my brother insisted and managed to get his way. The invitation came from the technical college and through the regional leadership my brother was allowed to travel to his place of study. Our commandant escorted the future student to the town and put him there under the supervision of another commandant. That's the sort of difficulties and hindrances which they put in the way of education for the settlers.[36]

The return to the homeland

Following the death of the 'leader of the peoples' and the exposing of L. Beria, a hope for rehabilitation appeared among all the 'punished nationalities'. Many people began to write complaints about the illegal repression that had taken place in the Stalin epoch. Those people, however, who had survived many years of having their rights trampled upon raised their voices timidly and cautiously in defence of their own rights. A letter written by a communist named L. Kirsanov is an example: 'The time has come to put an end to restrictions imposed on Kalmyks. Possibly these measures were necessary and justified during the war, but at present they are no longer necessary . . . Soldiers and officers who had served in the Soviet Army during the war must be the first to be granted all rights.'[37] On 17 March 1956, following decisions taken by the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a resolution entitled 'On the lifting of legal restrictions imposed on the deported Kalmyks and their family members'.

The gravest consequences of the deportation period were the human losses. According to the 1926 census, the number of Kalmyks was 129,321, whereas the 1937 census, the results of which were kept secret, gives a somewhat lower figure of 127,336. In the All-Union census of 1939 the number of Kalmyks had dropped to 88,900.[38] In 1949, all members of the deported ethnic groups were registered, as were all other deportees, such as former members of the Vlasov Army, those who had served in the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) and former *kulaks*. Results of this registration enable one to trace the changes in the size of the Kalmyk population from the beginning of deportation up to 1949.[39] Of the 91,919 Kalmyks who had been deported from Kalmykia, 73,727 were registered in 1949, and 16,017 had died by that time. By 1959, the total number of Kalmyks had dropped to 64,900.[40]

On 10 March 1955, the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs gave permission to issue passports for deportees according to the usual procedure, since up to this time the Kalmyks had no passports. A decree of the USSR Supreme Council, signed in March 1956, lifted the legal restrictions to which

Kalmyk deportees and their family members were subjected. Notwithstanding the contents of this decree, its tone was still imperial, as was the attitude of the leaders of the state towards the Kalmyk people. The decree runs as follows:

1 Settlements in which the deportees reside shall no longer be subjected to registration, and administrative surveillance shall be lifted from deportees and their family members who had been sentenced to exile during the Second World War.
2 The lifting of restrictions related to deportation does not entail the return of the property confiscated from the deportees, and the deportees are not entitled to return to places from which they had been deported.[41]

The governmental policy was supported by the CPSU Central Committee, which passed a resolution ordering 'Central Committees of the Communist Parties of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzia, as well as Altai and Krasnoyarsk Regional Committees, and the Committees of the CPSU for the Sakhalin, Kemerovo, Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Omsk, and Tyumen provinces, to take due measures to secure the stay of Kalmyks in their present places of residence and to prevent their mass departure.'[42]

Towards the end of the 1950s the Kalmyks began to return to their homeland. In accordance with a resolution by the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, in February 1957 the sixth session of the USSR Supreme Council endorsed a decree issued by its Presidium on 9 January entitled 'On the Establishment of the Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast of the Russian Federation within its former territory in the Stavropol region'. On 25 January 1957, Kalmyks were authorized to reside and be registered in the places from which they had been deported. Elections for local soviets (councils) were held in March the same year.

On 29 July 1958, the Kalmyk Autonomous Oblast was transformed into the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic. In the course of 1956–7, practically all the Kalmyks returned to the newly founded republic. Staying in Siberia was out of the question, since that would be tantamount to pleading guilty and admitting that Stalin's sentence was just.

Children born in the period of the return to their native land began to be given Kalmyk names, as not infrequently these names were celebratory in an epic manner and were associated with the joy of returning: examples include *Syan Tsag* (Blessed Time) and *Tsagan Khaalg* (White Road). Prior to the deportation, many farms, villages and hamlets bore Kalmyk names, such as Syantsig, Budga or Khazhurta. Later many were given new names typical of Soviet society, as a result of which in 1991 there were in the republic three farms named 'Komsomol' (the Young Communist League), three named after party congresses, seven after Lenin, four after the October Revolution and three after Kirov.[43]

Historical discourse

For a long time any kind of reminiscence about this tragic period in the people's history was forbidden. It was a blank spot on the map, not merely in official academic studies but also in verbal traditions that referred to 'before Siberia' and 'after Siberia', 'before migration' and 'after migration'; the fact of deportation itself was not mentioned. Older people's accounts usually avoided giving a direct evaluation of the historical facts and bore only a personal character. Probably such a tight-lipped attitude to a national tragedy was connected with the Stalinist charge of treason: individual Kalmyks, alongside representatives of other ethnic groups, voluntarily went into the service of the German army as a military sub-unit that, for propaganda purposes, was called the Kalmyk cavalier corps. Incidentally, the invaders first of all opened a prayer house for the Kalmyks (as all Buddhist temples had already been destroyed) and allowed Buddhist services, by which they gained the favour of part of the residents. In the official indictment of the nation's guilt was adduced the circumstance that just one national division had been formed voluntarily on the republic's territory: in strength it was a third the size of a corps. So this simple arithmetic plus the fear of repressive actions by the authorities facilitated a conscious silence that should not be considered as an admission of guilt. An accusation of treason by a whole ethnic group was a damaging blow to the nation's sense of dignity: such an absurd indictment is always hard to refute. Moreover, the charge was unfair, for in every family had been frontline soldiers, and for a much deeper reason too: Russia had truly become the homeland for the Kalmyks, whose ancestors had defended it on more than one occasion with weapons in their hands. Moreover, among ethnic groups with strong clan traditions, 'honour' and 'loyalty' constituted fundamental principles of ethics.

How did people regard the accusation brought against them? The most ill-informed people supposed that in this manner the 'father of all the peoples', Stalin, was saving the Kalmyks from enslavement to fascism. Many perceived what had happened as a terrible mistake by Stalin, whom enemies of the people had misinformed. These people, basically former representatives of the party-state elite (*nomenklatura*) and the national intelligentsia, wrote a letter to the Kremlin, 'personally to Stalin', trying rationally to reach an explanation of the reasons for the deportation and its justification.

> To the leader and teacher of the peoples of the USSR, comrade Stalin:
>
> Dear and deeply esteemed Joseph Vissarionovich,
>
> The peoples of the USSR, not excepting even the very smallest ethnic group, happily and with joy look out on their future . . . And only we, the Kalmyks, by our misfortune, constitute an exception. Beginning with the tragic day of the loss of our national autonomy, scattered by

three, five or ten families in the immense and bleak Siberia, the Kalmyks are physically dying out, suffering moral and national degradation.

This became possible only because among us, the Kalmyks, was found a negligible little gang of traitors, cursed by their people . . . We know that the human, civic conscience of the vast majority of the Kalmyks remains pure.

Each of the peoples of our land is reporting now on their victories and achievements in the years of the Patriotic War. But the Kalmyks are deprived of such an opportunity, although in proportion to their strength they were toiling together with other peoples. For two and a half years' duration of the war this small people gave to the country and to the front one hundred million kilos of bread, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of vegetables, six hundred thousand head of cattle, one hundred million kilos of fish, and by their own energies built in the zone behind the front 250 kilometres of railway lines, not counting other material help to the front.

Thousands of Kalmyks' sons in a honourable and manly way fought on all fronts, many of them gave their lives for Soviet power – for you, comrade Stalin – and for the happiness of their own people . . . In the most difficult conditions of the open steppe wilderness, despite the mistake of their leadership, the Kalmyks organized and stirred up, together with Russians and Ukrainians, a partisan war against the occupiers.

It could be said that this is little. But it should not be forgotten that we, the Kalmyks, are a thousand times smaller than the Russians, four hundred times smaller than the Belorussians, and sixty times smaller than the Kazakhs. We trust that our government, and you personally, dear Leader and Teacher, will judge the national and historical viability and full value of the Kalmyks precisely by these facts and not according to the evil deeds of a gang of traitors. Individuals or tens of people might be traitors but a whole people group will never be traitors.

The Kalmyks await a decision on their fate from the government and from you, dear Joseph Vissarionovich. They should be returned to their native land, nationally united, politically rehabilitated and economically reborn . . .

With Communist regards,

Tseren Korsunkiyev, Dordzhi Gakhayev, Dordzhi Andrayev.
Barabinsk, Novosibirsk oblast, 29 April 1946[44]

The authors of this letter, and people similar to them who had written their own letters to the Kremlin, were almost all repressed a second time and from their Siberian settlements were taken to a camp for political prisoners. Such a fate befell the young poet David Kugul'tinov, who in conversation with his fellow countrymen expressed his opinion that 'they treated the Kalmyks like this because . . . they are a small nationality, whom it's possible to throw

about freely . . . Here betrayal and the management's bad work did not play such a large role as the factor of a small population and belonging to national minorities.' Ideological blinkers have hampered any appraisal of the decision by the party and government: in that same conversation the other person replied to D. Kugul'tinov, 'With regard to the Kalmyks I tell you straight: they got whatever they deserved, but the unity of the peoples is being strengthened and will get stronger despite what has "befallen" the Kalmyks.'[45]

Others laid full responsibility on the 'father of the peoples' for the repression of the Kalmyks. There exists a cycle of Siberian songs in which anonymous authors speak their opinion. Accordingly, in several songs the cruel resettlement is connected with the state authorities: 'At the same time the Kalmyks migrated off by decree of the Supreme Soviet', 'The red-tasseled Kalmyks are weeping, aggrieved by the power of the Reds' (a red tassel on the headgear was a mark of ethnic distinctiveness). A traditional mentality formulated the forced resettlement as a test sent from above for sins – for example, for renunciation of the yellow faith of their forefathers. This too is reflected in ballads: almost every Siberian song contains a reproach to the guardian genies that they did not protect people. In many texts it is mentioned that the nation was punished because they were not 'without blame' or 'without sin'. However, one also encounters the reasoning that it was necessary to separate out the guilty from the innocent. Characteristically, all these songs are performed to the accompaniment of a dombra (a Kalmyk stringed instrument similar to a mandolin), almost in a dance rhythm, and to the ear do not sound like laments. There are more prestigious genres of Kalmyk songs: hymns and long drawn-out songs. These are devoted to eternal problems such as the orderliness of the universe, the changing seasons of the year or love.

In this context the Siberian epopee was not perceived as worthy of eternity. Nevertheless, despite the 'eternity' of the punishment and the hard conditions, the Kalmyks still believed that they would certainly return home, because they were convinced that the nation was not guilty but had been cruelly slandered. Hence verses were composed by non-professional poets too, because in those years many people trusted paper more than the spoken word. The following lines were published only recently but were penned in 1944 by a young Kalmyk named Badma Lidzhi-Goryaev, and are entitled 'For one's own personal satisfaction':

> It is hard to say when and where
> They will begin to gather us
> But personally I have no doubt
> That we shall be gathered.
> I do not fear the long distances;
> I grieve only for my homelands.
> I'm not afraid that somewhere I'll perish;
> I grieve only that
> My native land has a grudge against me.[46]

The Kalmyks ended up in much harder circumstances than those, for example, of the Chechens or Balkars, who were deported to a place which was similar to their homeland in terms of geography (mountains) and religion (Islam), and, moreover, were not dispersed to such an extent as were the Kalmyks. However, modern Kalmyk recollections of those years either have a facetious character – describing the most cruel events through the cultural prism of a joke – or focus on the kindness of the Russian people.

> Mum always began her tales of her ordeals from that moment when the Russian captain helped to load on to the cart things to keep us warm. And all the relatives began to bless him and wish him well in every way. And we sincerely believed that the captain was alive. Granny also interwove the word 'captain' into her Buddhist prayers. Older people said that if it hadn't been for him we would have been frozen to the floor of the wagon for ever.[47]

> I remember how we were escorted from the station to Russian villages . . . Many of those who met us came with sheepskin coats to warm us up. Beria's men had put out a rumour that the people coming were cannibals with daggers in their belts, so at first they looked at us with distrust. Later, however, their attitude thawed out and often the peasants took pity on us and helped us. The Russian people are big-hearted and kind.[48]

In 1949 the cases of those who had escaped were revealed, the names of 268 of them being listed in a document sent to the Astrakhan department of the MVD. As a result, in June that year the regime for those living in deportation colonies was made even more severe. A new instruction for the MVD commandants supervising the deportees stated that 'deported Kalmyks, Germans, Chechens, Ingush [etc.] . . . shall be regarded as evictees'. According to the decree passed by the Supreme Council on 26 November 1948, these persons had been evicted forever, and any unauthorized departure (referred to as escape) of deportees from places in which they had been obliged to settle was punished by twenty years of hard labour.[49]

Until December 1943 the Republic's administrative and territorial arrangement took into account the *ulus* principle, at the basis of which lay ethno-territorial boundaries. In Siberia all Kalmyks were mixed up together and were so dispersed that, on meeting another Kalmyk, there was no significance in knowing who came from which *ulus*, as all were equally without rights. It was just then that an awareness of national unity emerged that to a significant degree was lost on their return. Nowadays, when reproaching someone for giving priority to local interests, called in Kalmykia 'ulusism', old people always give the example of the Siberian years when they got over ulusism.

The history of the Oirats has been full of hardships. Even though they became associated with Russia of their own free will, eventually the initial

relationship of free association between the Kalmyks and Russians gave way to something that Yu. M. Lotman described as 'handing oneself over'. Such relationships are always unequal: one side expects to receive protection from the other, but its absence is not considered to be a basis for severance of the relationship. Whereas one side offers everything, the other may or may not fulfil its promises; the psychology of exchange is excluded.

Events such as the abolishment of the Kalmyk khanate, the 1771 exodus, another exodus during the Civil War (1920) and the Siberian genocide eventually resulted in submissiveness and the readiness to sacrifice everything for the sake of that which is primary – the preservation of the nation.

During the deportation, all forms of protest were legitimate: letters, songs, and personal conversations. Their tone, moreover, was not accusatory but was one of self-vindication.

Several publications addressing the history of the Kalmyks' deportation have been produced, mostly consisting of memoirs and collections of documents. Among them are the two-volume *Book of Memory*, in which the names of ten thousand persons who died during that period are listed, and the *Memoirs of the Prisoners of Shiroklag*. Two books on the Kalmyks' deportation, written by historians and containing many documents, made their appearance: these were V. B. Ubushaev's *Exile and Return: 1943–1957* and N. F. Bugay's *Operation 'Uluses'*.[50]

During Gorbachev's era, the USSR Supreme Council passed a declaration 'On the acknowledgement of illegal and criminal repressive acts against peoples subjected to forced deportation, and on guaranteeing their rights'. One of the results of this was that former deportees received some financial compensation, but of greater significance was the moral resonance of the state's public repentance in front of its own citizens, even if it was nearly half a century later. The compensation procedures provoked what elderly people regard as righteous indignation. To become registered as a victim of political repression or as a victim's heir, one has to submit eight documents including a birth certificate (but these were not issued in Kalmykia before 1926), a document certifying the relative's death (but such documents were not regularly issued in Siberia) and one confirming kinship (which would be very difficult to obtain, for example, by a seventy-year-old woman whose father died in Siberia). People had been deported without any documents – and they were not retained even by those who did have them. To obtain compensation for the loss of a house, it is necessary to submit a copy of the pre-war house register – even though all archives were destroyed either during occupation or at the time of the abolition of the Kalmyk autonomous republic in 1943. To attest to one's year of birth, kinship or ownership of a house before the war, people applying to the courts had to bring two witnesses, so in Kalmykia the courts were full of elderly plaintiffs.

Recognizing these bureaucratic procedures to be insulting to former deportees, the Kalmyk Parliament, on 28 September 1994, passed a resolution concerning the 'simplification of procedures' and for some time the procedures

for submitting papers for material compensation became more straightforward. However, the federal authorities considered it impossible to adopt a simplified procedure for granting large financial compensation. Both the large amount of red tape in the submission of applications and the long wait for the compensation itself are sources of discontent among Kalmyks of the older generation (those aged sixty and above). The extent of the pay-outs was as follows: for the loss of home ownership, 100 times the minimum wage; for the loss of personal property, forty times the minimum wage. In 1995 this sum was US$1660 but in 2000 it was US$660.

Another problem produced as a consequence of the events in 1943 is that of unreturned territories. Two districts apportioned to the Astrakhan region, thirteen villages in the Kalmyk District of the Rostov region and the so-called Black Lands used as pastures by Dagestan have not yet been, and are unlikely in the near future to be, returned to Kalmykia because at the moment there is a moratorium on any territorial claims. Why are these territories considered important for the Kalmyks? The two districts in the Astrakhan region mentioned above were the most fertile lands in the possession of the Kalmyk people; here was the large mouth of the Volga river, which gave opportunities for fishing, horticulture and market gardening. This is the place where the Oirats arrived and settled in the seventeenth century. These particular districts were at the heart of Kalmyk cultural life from the beginning of the twentieth century right through to 1936, when Elista became the new capital. Within this same area is located the only Kalmyk Buddhist temple that was preserved in Russia, the Khosheutovsky khurul.

Another consequence of the deportation was the loss of museum materials. An unwritten rule of museum custodianship is that, in a *force majeure* case when a museum's future is endangered, its curators normally transfer materials in their charge to the care of the nearest museum. This did not happen in December 1943. After the restoration of the Kalmyk Republic, a regional museum was founded, and its exhibits should have been assembled anew. However, it proved impossible to restore the old exhibition because most exhibits had been lost during the deportation period. Those ornaments that had been owned by Kalmyk women and taken to Siberia had been exchanged for food, and many domestic utensils were left in abandoned houses. Various rarities of Kalmyk origin are still turning up in the collections of different Russian museums but at present it is hardly possible to return them to Kalmykia.

Deportation and attitudes to it were kept secret in Kalmyk families for a long time. It was only in the perestroika years that the Siberian genocide became a permitted topic of discussion, although no serious studies have been published so far. The 'Siberian syndrome' was overcome after 1989, when it became a topic that could be discussed in public. In 1993, a Memorial Train passed along the known route. Its passengers were elderly people who wished to recollect those places, meet friends and visit the graves of

relatives. Four Memorial Trains (in 1993, 1998, 1999 and 2001) became positive emotional experiences of a tragic event that they had gone through, bringing a catharsis not only to those who had taken part in the events but also, owing to the wide media coverage, to the whole nation.

Coping with the internalization of historical experience is continuing, but, as shown by the essays of schoolchildren, its boundaries are delineated and there is limited space for any dramatization of the past.[51] In the course of a few decades, the dramatic story has been central to imaginary historicizing, and the assimilation of the trauma opens up prospects for its routinization.

Recently in Elista I saw an old man out for a walk with his five-year-old grandson. 'This is the first generation of Kalmyk children to know their grandfathers', he said to me. I had to agree. Indeed, I have seen both of my own grandfathers only in photographs.

3 Diaspora and identity

> At the Festival of Youth in Vienna in 1957 there was a meeting between two Kalmyks: Alexei Ivanchukov, an American Kalmyk, and Vladimir Dorzhinev, the First Secretary of the Kalmyk Regional Committee of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League. Forty years later Alexei remembered: 'Vladimir said to me, "We've just come back to our homeland". Immediately I forgot about my anti-communism, we hugged each other and didn't talk about politics.'[1]

The understanding of 'homeland' in the Kalmyk language signifies 'the land where I was born' (*törskn gazr*). For a nomadic people – for the Kalmyks – who by virtue of their 'historical destiny' have had to change their places of residence, 'the land of one's birth' has often been left far behind, away from their primary migration routes. A small homeland in the sense of 'one's own place, where a person feels himself to be at home' is more apt for the nomad's home territory (*nutug*). 'Homeland' in the sense of one's native state was understood after their coming within the bounds of the Russian Empire in the first half of the seventeenth century and the corresponding ratification of a subject relationship with Moscow – as was the case for the Kalmyk khanate within the composition of Russia. The Oirats, having resided for a long time in Jungaria (present-day Xinjiang, in the People's Republic of China), were divided among themselves, so in the seventeenth century the Oirats simultaneously had three khanates: the Jungar, the Kukenor and the Volga Khanates. However, only that part of the Oirats who found themselves included within the composition of the Russian state received the ethnonym 'Kalmyk'. This externally applied ethnonym 'Kalmak' became the self-designation of the 'Khalmgud' people, singling out the Volga Kalmyks as an independent people with their identity as 'Volga Kalmyks'. In the course of time, the predicate 'Volga' lost its significance and in popular consciousness was implicitly replaced by 'Russian Kalmyks' (*Äräsän halmgud*). Under the conditions of their oath of fealty, the Kalmyk khan was obliged to guard the southern frontiers of the Russian state and to help with his troops in Russia's military campaigns. The participation of the

Kalmyks in Russia's wars – in the Northern War and the Persian campaign of Peter the First, and especially in the 1812 war against Napoleon – continues to remain even now a source of pride for the Kalmyk people.

At the level of basic identity they are therefore 'Russian Kalmyks' (*Äräsän halmgud*). Meanwhile, practically until the 1920s the Kalmyks had ethno-territorial groups that resided outside of their basic territorial enclave: the Tersk or Kumsk Kalmyks dwelt in the region between the rivers Terek and Kuma, the Orenburg Kalmyks in the Orenburg province and the Chuguyevsk Kalmyks in Ukraine, in the town of Chuguyev. In 1920 they were resettled to Kalmykia. When the Kalmyk autonomous region was formed, it included those lands that from the arrival of the Kalmyks in Russia had been called the Kalmyk steppe.

Identity within the ethnic group

The Kalmyks who had lived in the lower Volga were divided into the following ethno-territorial groups: the Derbets, Torguts, Khosheuts and Buzava. The origins of the first three had significance to do with the military social order in the past, whereas the Buzava or Don Kalmyks were formed from people of Torgut and Derbet origin who migrated to the Don region in the eighteenth century. Later, having set up thirteen Cossack villages, they were included in the Great Don Host. With regard to the ethnic composition of the thirteen Cossack squadrons or *aimak*s, Professor Arash Bormanschinov has emphasized that the majority of the Buzava *aimak*s (eight out of the thirteen) were primarily of Derbet extraction and only five could point to their Torgut origins.[2]

The Derbets were also subdivided into two groups, one of which, the lesser Derbets (*bag dörvüd*), was actually significantly larger than the greater Derbets (*iki dörvüd*). Further subdivisions, the *ulus*es, were, in their turn, made up of clans. Many clan names had totemic roots: for example, Iki Bukhus (the large bulls), the Keryats (from *kerya*, a raven) and Chonsa (from *chon*, a wolf). Many ethnonym-totems were connected with the colour of a horse's coat, such as *sharnut* (dun, palomino or light chestnut), *kharnut* (black or bay) and *buurul* (grey or roan).[3] The origins of other ethnonyms – the Merkits and Tyayachuds – were connected with the formative period of Chinggis Khan's empire.

According to data from the first pan-Russian census of 1897, about 190,000 Kalmyks were residing in eight provinces of the south-east of European Russia, of whom 88 per cent were located in the eastern districts of the European part of the Astrakhan province – that is, on the Kalmyk steppe. At the present time, the Kalmyks of the Kalmyk Republic form 88 per cent of the Kalmyk population of Russia and more than 84 per cent of the Kalmyks of the Commonwealth of Independent States. On 1 January 1997 the Kalmyk population in the Republic of Kalmykia consisted of about 149,000 people. Outside the borders of the republic, over 8000 Kalmyks

were living in the Astrakhan region, with more than 1000 in the city of Astrakhan itself: even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Astrakhan was the only city of Russia that had a Kalmyk population. Fewer than 2000 Kalmyks were living in the Volgograd region. Over 5000 Karakol Kalmyks or Sart-Kalmyks were residing in Kyrgyzstan, in the district around Lake Issyk-Kul, and about 1000 in Kazakhstan. By the 2003 census, the Kalmyks in the Russian Federation numbered 174,000.

According to the 1989 census, there was a total of 322,579 inhabitants of Kalmykia.[4] Of these there were:

Kalmyks	146,316	45.4%
Russians	121,531	37.7%
Dargins	12,878	4.8%
Chechens	8329	2.6%
Kazakhs	6277	1.9%
Ukrainians	4069	1.3%
Avars	3871	1.2%
Germans	5586	1.7%

(The total for these ethnic groups comes to 308,857. Other ethnic groups make up the remaining 13,722 people.)

In recent years the ethnic proportions of the population have changed considerably. Even in the 1970s the Russians had been the most numerous group in the republic, among both the urban and the rural population. However, it was only in 1979 that the Kalmyks were able to restore their pre-war numbers: in 1939 they had accounted for 140,000 people and in 1979 there were 147,000. In the 1980s Kalmyks became dominant in both rural settlements and urban centres. Despite the rapid growth of Elista and a large influx of rural residents to the city, the number of Kalmyks continued to grow in rural districts too. The Slavic population of Kalmykia is concentrated in the capital and in the western districts of the countryside – in Gorodovikovskiy and Yashaltinskiy. A significant percentage of the citizens of Elista are first or second generation urban dwellers.

Ethno-sociological research conducted in 1997 among young people provides material for the study of their ethnic self-awareness. Of the 800 surveyed students and school pupils, 400 were Kalmyks. There are some interesting responses to the question, 'To what extent is your ethnicity significant to you?' It turns out that it was 'very significant' for a third of the respondents, 'significant' for 40 per cent, of little significance for 17 per cent and not at all significant for 4 per cent. Thus ethnicity was of little or practically no significance for 21 per cent of the polled Kalmyk teenagers. One can evaluate this fact in various ways, but personally I am glad that the new generation feels itself simply to be people, citizens – and glad precisely because these young people feel comfortable in their republic and are no longer confronted with problems connected with inter-ethnic relationships.

Throughout many years after 28 December 1944 not a single Kalmyk was unable to attribute significance to his or her national identity: they were reminded of it every day. This feeling of being an outcast group has for a long time informed people's self-awareness. It is only the generation that took part in the survey (that is, those born since about 1979 or 1980) that has been able to allow itself not to attach significance to this item on the questionnaire. This testifies to the appearance among the youth of freer personal orientations, not as rigidly connected with belonging to officially fixed categories of 'nationality' (that is, ethnicity). It is yet another indicator of healthy inter-ethnic relationships in the republic, where in Kalmyk families suspicious or unhealthy attitudes towards their own or others' national identity have not been fostered. Neither have antagonistic nationalistic attitudes or feelings been manifested on the part of the Russians (who in most situations are the other main ethnic group). Certainly one must not forget the youthfulness of the respondents, so the coming years could present an alternative orientation with respect to Kalmyk identity, but at present these are people who have not yet encountered problems of this kind in their lives.

After perestroika, religious and local identities, which had been prohibited in Soviet times, began to come back into the lives of the Kalmyks. The fact that Buddhist symbols have come into the value structure of society is well shown by the modern names of private enterprises and social institutions: the 'Sumeru' supermarket, the 'Chindamani' shop, the 'Sansara' and

Figure 3.1 Modern Kalmyk youth at an Internet café. Photo: Sophie Loubaton.

'Nirvana' discotheques and a construction firm called 'Tantra'. Some academic works on the history of local groups have also begun to appear, such as P. Alexeyeva's monograph *Grabbevskaya*, on the history of one of the Don Kalmyk settlements.[5] Another example is the collection of documents and reminiscences entitled *Erketeni*, in which are collected historical reports on the local population of the Erketenskiy *ulu*s.[6]

The democratization of social life after *perestroika*, especially the favourable conditions in the religious sphere, was conducive to several changes in household religiosity. Members of the older generation, especially women, began regularly to visit informal temples and perform special rituals for all members of their families. Rituals such as the one for the prolongation of life demanded the presence of children at the prayers. Almost all children and grandchildren of contemporary elderly women have Buddhist protective amulets that they wear around the neck, among them protective multicoloured threads with special 'knots of happiness'. Practically in every Kalmyk home nowadays it is possible to find an image of the Buddha, a statue or a photograph of His Holiness the Dalai Lama the fourteenth and photographs of Rimpoche Telo Tulku, who was chosen as Shadzhin Lama of Kalmykia in 1995, and of Rimpoche Kushchok Bakula, who was the first high-ranking Tibetan teacher to visit the republic. Lamps to place before the images and incense for burning in censers are also among the most important items to be preserved in every home. These features of ethnic identification are, as far as a large part of the Kalmyk youth is concerned, the basis for aligning themselves with the Buddhist world. In this way, the religious identity of Kalmyk young people appears to be a consequence of their citizenship and a sense of belonging to their ethnic group. However, there is also in this context great significance in the Kalmyks' Asiatic phenotype as a marker perceptibly distinguishing the republic's Kalmyk population from its Slavic components.

Being members of the great Mongoloid race, with dark hair, a sallow face colour, a double eye fold (epicanthus) and the 'Mongolian spot' at birth, but for many years living far from the historical homeland of their forefathers, the Kalmyks have acquired several signs of interbreeding with other peoples. However, these are secondary indicators, noticeable only to specialists and to bearers of the culture themselves. Moreover, even though both the lifestyle of the Kalmyk youth and, at times, their ways of thinking are strongly set in standard European forms, they are still perceived in Russian society and by people living in the neighbourhood of the Kalmyks in the same way as before – as representatives of the Mongolian racial type.

The relationship between outward appearance and self-awareness was particularly straightforward in the period of the deportation. In their exile the Kalmyks were dispersed across Siberia, the North and the Far East. Those more fortunate ones who ended up in Kazakhstan and Central Asia were but few in number. In such dispersed settlements, when two or three Kalmyk families turned up in one Siberian village, but it was announced to

the local inhabitants that those exiled were cannibals, whom the locals accordingly tried to shun, anyone would have felt stigmatized in terms of his or her ethnic identity.

Notions of beauty and identity

Notions of beauty among contemporary young people are noticeably distinguished from the standards of their grandmothers' generation. For instance, even fifty years ago it was reckoned that breast development among young girls was not good: it was a sign of early maturing, of sexuality and, more than that, of possible moral laxity. A girl had to be flat-chested at the front and not curvaceous from behind either. Nowadays young men call such girls 'flat-bottomed boats', 'sheets of veneer' or 'planks', and prefer girls who, as it is said, have everything on them. Previously it was also reckoned that bow-leggedness among men and women was a legacy of nomadism and was taken as a norm. Now for a girl to have bandy legs is a great misfortune and such cases are encountered much more rarely, since from childhood mothers check on how a young girl's legs grow; such legs are also a drawback in a man's appearance. When women of the older generation had been young, no particular significance had been imputed to a person's height (although it was more important for a man), whereas nowadays for both sexes it is seen as one of the basic features of a person's outward appearance. Particular significance is attached – and this is by tradition – to the colour of one's skin, the tints of which can vary from white and virtually rosy (called *tsagan*) through to very brown shades, which among ordinary people are defined as black. Dark-skinned girls and women try to lighten their complexions using powder and various creams, and throughout hot periods of the year they wage a struggle against being suntanned. Great significance is also attributed to the fold of the upper eyelid (*zeg*), which is absent from some Kalmyks. Very often, when a child is born, especially a girl, people ask whether or not she has the double eye-fold and whether she is fair or dark skinned. Previously Kalmyks reckoned that a girl or woman should not be plump and that it was better for her to be slender. In recent years, however, the standards of European and American photographic models have affected the majority of women aged between the ages of twenty-five and fifty, who, even if they do not in fact attempt to slim, nevertheless are constantly intending to do something about their personal weight. European standards have thus become dominant in relation to notions of beauty in the Kalmyk republic. Not so very long ago comparison with the Japanese had been a compliment for Kalmyks, but nowadays it is not taken as a compliment, as the Japanese are said to have short legs and crooked teeth, not to have slim waists and so on. A modern beauty in the eyes of today's youth should be tall and well proportioned, have rounded buttocks, developed breasts, a light shade of skin and a fold on the upper eyelid; her face should be long rather than round, and her cheekbones not too wide. More

precisely, it is a 'Japanese face on a European body'. In any case, all the winners of beauty contests in the republic have looked more or less like that. Incidentally, this is also how the image of Alexandra Burataeva, the primary announcer on channel one of Central TV, is perceived, and likewise it is the way people see Delgir Tserenova, who came second in the All Russian beauty contest in Moscow in 1995. This noticeably differs from a well known portrait of a Kalmyk woman in Russian literature, the one whom A. S. Pushkin met on his journey to Arzrum and who on the steppe very nearly allured him to follow her nomad tent. Remembering this, the great Russian poet wrote: 'Your eyes, of course, are narrow, and nose flat, and forehead wide'.[7]

Conceptions of beauty among the Kalmyks have for a long time been oriented towards types with a European tinge. So, those who are popularly considered to be most beautiful are Tersk Kalmyks, in whose genealogies it is possible to detect Kabardin ancestors. As for individual beauty, the expression of typical Mongolian traits seems to be in inverse proportion to the degree to which a person appears to be more attractive at the present time. Children of mixed marriages between Kalmyks and non-Kalmyks – and more particularly with non-Mongoloids – are considered to be synonymous with beautiful people. Such children are generally called *baldyr* (meaning 'mixed'). The word *baldyr* can be said to have become a synonym for beauty, so that if somebody is said to be a *baldyr* what is implied is not so much the ethnic composition of the person's family but his or her physical attractiveness. Up to the present time, if the question of a possible wedding of a mixed pair is discussed, a 'pro' argument is the certainty that 'anyway, the children are bound to be beautiful'. This is also an excuse for having children before marriage. If a single mother has a child who is a *baldyr*, she will be treated in society with more sympathy and understanding.

An orientation towards Western standards has been especially strengthened in the past decade under the influence of the mass media. For many Turkic peoples, in several Central Asian republics, Turkey has come to be seen as an attractive model of an Eastern country with a developed economy that, even if it also reproduces many Western models, still keeps its Eastern face. For the Kalmyks, Mongolia has not become such a point of orientation because it is not profitably distinguished economically or culturally, and also because of several historical rivalries between different peoples in the narrow Mongolian world. In such a situation, the minds of the younger generation are swayed by pro-Western orientations implanted by the mass media and by representatives of the Kalmyk diaspora in the USA. For instance, in the course of field research organized by the Institute for Ethnography and Anthropology to study the formation of gender stereotypes among Kalmyk children we asked those in the first class to draw a picture on the theme 'Myself as an adult': four out of ten girls drew themselves as future blondes. Their mothers confirmed that the girls watch the French serial *Helen and Friends* and very much like the main blonde heroine. In

such a way firmly established stereotypes about perceptions of beauty among the Kalmyks are represented as a complimentary self-portrait of a Europeanized Asian. The fact that the Kalmyks have lived in the European part of the Eurasian landmass for more than four centuries is also a source of pride for the people. In one of the districts of the republic I had occasion to hear a story about some people from Moscow who had come and, after getting to know the Kalmyks, called the Kalmyk women 'French Asians'.[8] In another instance, it was said of the Kalmyks that they are 'the little Japanese of Europe'. The pertinent point here is not simply that such a thing was said but that the comment was not forgotten.

In this way it could be supposed that it is their physical phenotype that appears to be the basic element in the ethnic self-definition of contemporary Kalmyks. Probably ethno-cultural identity and an awareness of one's general origins are the factors next in importance.

Civil identities

Some words on citizenship identity are in order. In this regard a key question is 'For us, which is our native land?' Answers are distributed in the following manner:

Kalmyk respondents	
Former USSR	3.7%
Russia	17.2%
The republic in which I live	71.1%
Difficult to give an answer	7.9%

The distribution of replies stands out more clearly in a comparison with the responses of Russian teenagers to the question, 'For us, which is our native land?' Their replies were:

Russian respondents	
Former USSR	10.9%
Russia	46.4%
The republic in which I live	26.1%
Difficult to give an answer	16.9%

It is not surprising that the majority of Kalmyk respondents should consider the republic of Kalmykia to be their native land. For them it is not simply a question of ascertaining their place of birth: contained within these questions are the schoolchildren's orientations to statehood. Declarations of the sovereignty of republics within the Russian Federation had equalized the status of republics that formerly had been 'autonomous regions'. When all republics were set on the same level a new impulse was imparted to take pride in one's own republic – which also gained its own flag, emblem and

anthem. Presidential elections became a further factor in the coming into being of Kalmyk statehood, and, importantly for us, there is also a reflection of this in the consciousness of youth. The way in which Kirsan Ilyumzhinov was elected as first President of the Republic of Kalmykia particularly suited the tastes of the youth, and his pre-election programme – a show with pop stars and using non-standard stratagems – was aimed at the support of young voters.

I would like to draw attention to the significance of sporting symbols for the reinforcement of regional civic identity. For a long time the republic lacked its own renowned sports personalities. The boxer Raimkul Malakhbekov – who trained under a Kalmyk trainer named Balzanov, who with his trainees came to the republic from Tajikistan in 1993 – became the first such hero, a world champion. After the eighteen-year-old sportsman's victory he was feted in Elista in the same way as Yuri Gagarin on his return from space: classes were cancelled in schools and the whole of the main square was full of people. Now all international boxing matches take place under the intense vigilance of Kalmyk fans.

Another source of sporting pride for the republic has come in the shape of the Uralan ('Forward') football team, which for a while (and for the first time in recent decades) played in Russia's premier league. So that it could gain promotion to the top league – and it was just such a goal that the president of the republic put before Uralan – experienced trainers and footballers were invited to the club. Despite there being not a single Kalmyk in

Figure 3.2 The Uralan football team in Elista. Photo: Mergen Bembinov.

Figure 3.3 Kalmyk wrestling. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

the football team at that time, it was, and remains today, the republic's favourite club, with each match taking place before packed grandstands. Its spectators have created the Uralan fan club and make up chants of support in both Kalmyk and Russian, such as 'To beat us you've got to drink Kalmyk tea' or 'From Moscow to Magadan there's nothing stronger than Uralan'. For the republic, entry into the premier league by one of its football teams, even without laying claim to the championship, served as a good advertisement because it changed the republic's image, because almost all the adult population of the republic know the names of teams playing at the highest level. It also imparted a vision to the youth team, which achieved second place among the youth teams of Russia. The team's successes are also followed by Kalmyks abroad, who often visit the 'Russian Football' website to find the most up-to-date news on Uralan.

Kalmyk traditions in sport, which appeared to have forever been left in the past, have once again become 'introduced from above', thanks to state policy aimed at reconstructing Kalmyk sports. By a decree of the republic's president in 1997, republic-level competitions were set up in national sports: horse-racing, wrestling, archery, lassoing a lively horse and throwing javelins at a target. These national games take place annually under the patronage of the president. The preliminary stages of the 'Jangariads' – as these games are called – take place in the republic's local districts, and afterwards the victors in the district games take part in the final. A requirement for participation in the Jangariads is that competitors have to wear Kalmyk

Figure 3.4 Horse racing is a traditional sport of the Kalmyks. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

national costume, irrespective of their own ethnic affiliations. Kalmyk wrestling by tradition has three different weight categories: the weight of an elephant, the weight of a lion and the weight of a wild boar.

The indisputable highlight of the Jangariad programme consists of races over a distance of fifty kilometres, in which the jockeys ride only race-horses of a Kalmyk breed. The prize for the winner of the races is a motor car: this was the reward for the winner of the first sporting Jangariad for completing forty-five kilometres in one hour and three minutes.

In youth subculture, musical identities have acquired an existential meaning. A large number of teenagers associate themselves with one or another trend in contemporary music, such as rock, metal, grunge or rap. They wear clothes to match, which declare their liking for one or another group. So, admirers of Nirvana wear sweatshirts and coats with appropriate inscriptions and portraits of Kurt Cobain, whereas rockers have narrow jeans with holes in them and bandana headscarves. Many walls of the entranceways to apartment blocks are painted with graffiti such as 'Cinema', 'Victor Tsoy, you are with us!', 'Rap – it's Yes!' or 'Nirvana'.

In common with many other ethnic groups, the Kalmyks have their diaspora, members of which live in diverse parts of the world.

The diaspora

The largest group of Kalmyks, whose numbers compare with the Kalmyk population of the Kalmyk Republic, live in Xinjiang, the Uighur autonomous

region of the People's Republic of China. These are descendants of those who left the Kalmyk khanate in 1771. In contrast with the Volga or Russian Kalmyks, they call themselves Torguts, consciously rejecting the ethnonym 'Kalmyk' as not applying to them. Nevertheless, they consider the Volga region ('Izhil') to be their homeland, and their songs of their homeland extol the water of the Volga. At the beginning of the 1990s a small group of Torguts from China came to live permanently in the Kalmyk republic. They were mainly from the creative intelligentsia – journalists and scholars – who were actively included in social life and at first were desired guests at all social functions. What at that time was an aspiration, also shared by the masses, for the 'revival' of Kalmyk culture was supported by the fervent desire of the newcomers to assist their native land to be set free from Soviet influence in its language and culture.

A group of Kalmyks also lives in Kyrgyzstan, in the Issyk-kul region and on the Kara Kol river. Often they are called 'Issyk-kul' or 'Karakol' Kalmyks but more often 'Sart-Kalmaks'; their own designation for themselves is 'Black Kalmyks' (*khar khal'mgud*) or Tekyasya Khal'mgud.[9] They are remnants of a group of Kalmyks who settled in these localities in 1862–4, after the Dungan rebellion in China, and they adopted Islam. According to data from 1929 the Karakol Kalmyks numbered 3988 people.[10] As for their origins, as shown by field materials from the 1980s, all Karakol Kalmyks, both old and young, are connected with the Volga Kalmyks, and with the Torgut ethno-territorial group of the Kalmyk people – more precisely with that part of the Torguts who call themselves *tsaatany*.[11] As a result of assimilation policies and the influence of the Kyrgyz majority, at the present time they have practically crossed over from a Kyrgyz–Kalmyk–Russian trilingualism to speaking the Kyrgyz language, although old people in 1982 still remembered the Kalmyk language well. Much in their culture nowadays has been borrowed from Kyrgyz culture, which is dominant in the Issyk-kul region: festivals, weddings and women's costume among the Karakol Kalmyks are similar to Kyrgyz ones.[12] Many terms of Kalmyk everyday life that have analogues in the Kyrgyz language were replaced by Kyrgyz synonyms, such as *shorpo* (*sholn*, soup), *syuzme* (*targ*, sour milk or yoghurt) and *kaimak* (*orm*, sour cream). Despite the significant Kyrgyz influence, even in the 1980s ethnographers who studied this group found many cultural elements that had been lost by the Volga Kalmyks. Dances in a sitting position have been preserved and folk songs forgotten among the Kalmyks have been recorded.

The Karakol Kalmyks always felt a kinship with the Volga Kalmyks and at any opportunity maintained their connections with Kalmykia. Envoys from the Karakol Kalmyks came in 1940 to the celebration of 500 years of the Kalmyk epic, and young people have come to study in the republic both before the war and nowadays. These feelings of kinship come from both sides, and in the Kalmyk State University reserved places have been specially set apart for the studies of Karakol students.

The Kalmyk diaspora in the USA is interesting in its cultural relationships.[13] It was made up of refugees who moved at the time of the Russian civil war and also during the Second World War.[14] Both waves of migrants met up in Germany, and in 1951 the Kalmyks were granted an opportunity to move to the USA. Kalmyks in the USA number about 1500 people. The area of their settlement is in the states of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The Kalmyks of the USA have created several cultural societies, on the strength of which four Buddhist temples have been built by them. The basic goals of the cultural social organizations in America are reflected in their titles: 'The Kalmyk Brotherhood in America', 'The Society of Zealots for Kalmyk Culture', 'Association of Kalmyks in the USA' and 'Dipidom'.

The majority of Kalmyks of an older age call themselves Kalmyks, putting the stress on the final syllable, similar to the word 'Cossacks'. This is probably connected with the rules of the Kalmyk language, in which the stress always falls on the last syllable. Not infrequently an unusual stress in pronunciation of the word 'Kalmykia' – with the accent on the third syllable (rather than the second syllable, as in standard Russian) – grates on my ears. This word appeared in the Russian language in the Soviet period and was not accepted as a native word by emigrants.

There is an excessively detailed demarcation into 'in groups' and 'out groups' among the Kalmyks, both within the Republic of Kalmykia and outside of its borders. Even Kalmyks of the diaspora speak about this. 'Why do we make distinctions among ourselves, as there are so few of us?', they say. However, it turns out that it is equally impossible to make no distinctions at all. Probably this is related to a nomadic inheritance and a finely subdivided clan and tribal structure. Nevertheless, Kalmyks who left Russia immediately separated into Don Kalmyks (Buzava) – who were the overwhelming majority – and Torguts and Derbets. This division has been preserved within the Republic too, but in everyday practice it is more significant among older people; however, it is also actualized during political electioneering, when candidates try to mobilize clan identities. In the USA, in the conversations of older people, especially those of a pedantic frame of mind, and more often among men, not infrequently after a person's name follows his identification by tribal affiliation, which, apparently, reflects still very durable thought stereotypes. The following tale comes from a Kalmyk who relatively recently arrived in the parts of the USA inhabited by Kalmyks: 'When I came here, I went to some kind of festival in Howell. One man happily came up to me as if to one of his relatives and questioned me until he understood that I am a Derbet. As soon as he comprehended this, immediately he grew cool towards me and lost any kind of interest.'[15]

Derbets and Torguts in the USA, of whom there were considerably fewer than the Buzava, sometimes united as a non-Buzava minority. Within the Buzava there are divisions into aimaks or camps. Many Buzava Kalmyks were Cossacks of the Don host, and emphasized their Cossack identity. Even their children at times complain that 'our old people are too much

Cossacks!' Those who were not Cossacks themselves did not completely share the devotion of the Kalmyk Cossacks to their military brigades. They saw in this not so much a belonging to a social class as a desire to belong, even partially, to a stronger and more numerous group, the Don Cossacks. Probably in fact it was the Kalmyk fighting spirit in particular that was impressed by military service and that historically attracted Kalmyk Cossacks. 'At home they were Kalmyks, but with Cossacks they were Cossacks. Even my father laughed. Who are you as a Cossack with slant eyes? What Cossacks have Kalmyk faces? Isn't it enough to belong simply to the Kalmyks?'[16] Nevertheless a Cossack identity was one of the vital ingredients in the consciousness of the first wave of emigrants. Long before the so-called 'Kalmyk exodus' of 1920, at the time when they were living in the Salsk region of the Great Don Host, the Don Cossacks were fond of the Kalmyks for their valour and military skill – qualities that they prized highly and that drew them to one another.[17] In Howell, New Jersey, on many gravestones in the Kalmyk section of the cemetery the name of the deceased person is followed by an inscription in Russian saying 'Kalmyk Cossack'.

Ending up in 1945 in camps for displaced persons in Germany, the Kalmyks were speedily divided up into Serbian, Bulgarian and French groups, but the priority of Kalmyk identity *vis-à-vis* non-Kalmyks was always maintained. Within the Kalmyk diaspora there were differences. Among the 'French' – those who were born or grew up in France – a French accent was kept, but, as if to make up for it, they were better dancers. Kalmyks born in France did not know Russian: for them, French was their first language and after that Kalmyk. Women born or brought up there were notable for their profoundly refined French taste. However, Kalmyks in France at times kept themselves aloof because they considered themselves to be more cultured. Serbian Kalmyks most of all, as well as Kalmyks who had been born in Bulgaria, knew Russian well, apart from Kalmyk and the local language, because they had attended Russian schools.

The Kalmyk expatriate community was augmented at the end of the Second World War by a group of Kalmyks who were the so-called second wave of emigration. There were more than 600 people. (According to different figures, there were initially between 600 and 5000 but some Kalmyks returned to their homeland after the end of the war.) There were about thirty families among them. Some had gone to work there of their own volition whereas others had ended up in captivity and were forced to work in Germany. Those who had come from the occupied republic were immediately called 'Soviets', 'godless people' or 'collective farm peasants'.[18] Among them were various types of people: there were more than twenty priests, who in their homeland had been sent first to a corrective labour camp; after that, as the occupation forces had opened a *khurul* in Elista and rituals were conducted there, they expected death as soon as the Soviet forces arrived. There were also among the new emigrants women who should have

evacuated livestock to Kazakhstan but had been frightened by rumours that the Kazakhs would steal them – just as at some time in the eighteenth century they had taken off women from a caravan of carts bound for Jungaria, and the poor people had turned back half-way to return home. When the Soviet forces came on the offensive, the women once again became frightened that communists were coming and so they would have to answer for the fact that they had returned to their families, abandoning state-owned livestock. There was only one topic of conversation: prison. 'So they also departed with the Germans, thinking it would not be for long, nor very far – and see how it turned out!'[19]

Among the 'new' emigrants – who were called *shinchud* (new) in contrast to the 'old emigrants' (*khuuchn*) – there were also collaborationists who had worked in organs of government under the German regime, as well as people who had been repressed by the Soviets. 'For the old emigrants, we were second-class emigrants, but now almost all differences have been forgotten.' As they now recall, the 'Soviets' in the camps were attached to the Bulgarians, but the 'Serbians' were always kept separately. A distinction (was it real?) was always there. It was as if the Serbians addressed their parents with the equivalent of 'Tu' in French, 'but we ["Bulgarians"] never. It was only "Ta" [the equivalent of the French "vous"] and we used terribly vulgar language – even the girls. The Serbs taught them to do this.' The new emigrants later began to be accused of being capable of beating their own wives but, it was said, the older emigrants never did so. They, for their part, said that the Don girls who had just got married could not even brew Kalmyk tea. Older émigrés were indignant at this accusation, saying, 'When should a girl learn to brew tea, if at home mother brews it?' Or 'Anyway, we were going to school.' In reply they received another reproach: only the older emigrant women knew how to apply lipstick![20]

In June 1945 emigrants from the second wave were forcibly repatriated. They were put straight away into prison camps. Then, after a minimum of ten years' imprisonment for their having been abroad, if they remained alive they were subsequently, 'for betrayal of the homeland', sent to their relatives in special deportation settlements in Siberia. A small number of those who had voluntarily decided to leave for their native land of Kalmykia in 1945 turned back half-way. On the way home, which took them through Hungary, they met a Soviet officer who told them that the Kalmyk republic had been dissolved and the people exiled. After this discussion many of them returned to Germany. A Kalmyk now living in the USA stated: 'I read about the deportation of the Kalmyks in a Russian émigré newspaper at the end of 1944. In a small note was cited a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR entitled "On the liquidation of the Kalmyk Autonomous Republic" and the exiling of the population to Siberia. It was hard to agree with this.'[21]

Likewise, in Germany there appeared a generation of 'Kalmyk Germans', children whose socialization had taken place in Germany:

> For us Germany is our home. We lived there, grew up, finished school, and we know everything there. Each year we go there on holiday, and every year our German friends come to us as our guests.
>
> In Germany a distinction was made between old emigrants and new ones, but now we've already forgotten this. At festivals we Kalmyks gathered together and sat at different tables: 'Bulgarians' at their table (and they would converse with one another in Bulgarian), 'Serbians' at their own table, and 'Germans' separately. Now Russian tables have appeared, and there are more of them each year.[22]

Despite a multilayered self-awareness, their primary identity is actually Kalmyk. Kalmyks in the USA regard themselves as a Kalmyk community: one of the indicators of this is a telephone directory containing exclusively the telephone numbers of Kalmyks living in the USA.

Despite a fractured type of self-consciousness, often I hear said about us Kalmyks that 'we've all come from one womb' (*Madn' tsugarn' neg omgas garsn*). This particularly relates to the Don Kalmyks, as seen in the following folk etymology, which explains the Don Kalmyks' clan ties:

> Uncle Gadya told me, 'If you reckon backwards, then we are all kin, brothers, because at some time a person by the name of Bogshirga – from this also came the name of the Bogshrgankna clan – had nine sons and one daughter'. From the sons came the Mangatovs from Mangat, the Ivanchukovs from Vanchug, the Tavunovs from Tavan, the Nikolayevs from Nikolai, the Petrovs from Petr, and the Kalachinovs from Kalach. Then all dispersed and founded their own clans.[23]

The majority of Kalmyks in the USA also simultaneously consider themselves to be Mongolians. Of course it was simpler to present oneself in that way, as Mongolians are better known throughout the world, than to explain who the Kalmyks are, which is quite difficult, and it does not put a great strain on interpretation because the Kalmyk language belongs to the Mongolian branch of the Altaic language family. For example, the lawyer Dava Urubzhurov explains to his children that they are Mongolians in the first instance, because, in his view, the Kalmyks are too few. The email login of my American friend is written as 'MONGOL SD', which can be decoded as 'Mongol Sari Dakuginov'. Even Paula Rubel's monograph is called *The Kalmyk Mongols*.[24] In response to my question as to why she gave her monograph that title, she answered that it was the self-designation of her respondents themselves.

In many family albums, alongside photographs of significance for the family, I have also seen photos of Mongolian costumes that were put on display at the 'Silk Road' exhibition. When the Mongolian circus came to New York, a bus was specially organized by active members of the

community for a collective trip to this event. Artists from Buryatia – the 'Yara' group – were specially invited to Howell for a concert because they are also representatives of the Mongolian world. In my own view, despite the understanding of an affinity with the Mongols of the Mongolian Republic, Kalmyks within the Kalmyk Republic always remember that there is some kind of distance between the two nations, probably because of the historical competition between the forty eastern (Khalkha) and four Western (Oirat) tribes.

If one also recalls forgotten ethnonyms, then for the Kalmyks of Russia there was in the first instance a historical self-designation as 'Oirats'. That is the name of one of the popular dance groups, the Oirats. Some Kalmyk politicians have proposed the introduction of a new ethnonym for a self-designation of the Kalmyks as 'Oirat Kalmyks', which in their opinion is more apt because it underlines the historical connection and continuity of the Oirats and Kalmyks.

Across the ocean, the place of the Oirats in popular consciousness has been ousted by the Mongols. Hence a boy who had been born in Elista but was living in the USA showed me a computer game of his and found Mongolia on it. Proudly he declared to me that this was the country in which he was born. It turned out that his mother had told her six-year-old child about the origins of the Kalmyk nation, but the boy had taken in just the idea that if this is my native land (or that of my ancestors), then it means that I was born there.

4 Language and the ethno-linguistic situation

> When my son in the sixth grade at school was nominated for a school competition in his native language, I had to hire a tutor for him.

Before I describe and analyse the ethno-linguistic situation in Kalmykia, let us go back some years to when, after a wave of linguistic laws rolled through the republics of the former Soviet Union, a similar piece of legislation was passed by the Kalmyk Republic's Supreme Soviet.

General characteristics

According to the law on languages adopted in 1992, the Kalmyk and Russian languages were proclaimed as official languages of the Kalmyk Republic (*Khal'mg Tangch* in Kalmyk). What was the real linguistic situation in the republic up to the moment of adoption of this law? In mid-1992 the Kalmyk language was not used in the Supreme Soviet and public organizations of Kalmykia. Since 1991, records have been kept in Kalmyk in only two of the ninety-seven rural soviets existing at that time.[1] Neither was there a single national school: the last national class with tuition in Kalmyk was closed in 1962.[2]

How could such an ethno-linguistic situation arise in Kalmykia? What kind of history of linguistic problems had there been in the republic? I shall briefly expound the basic reasons for a transition from the native language, via Kalmyk–Russian and then Russian–Kalmyk bilingualism, to an overwhelmingly Russian-speaking ethnic group.

Kalmyk belongs to the languages of the Western branch of the Mongolian group of the Altaic language family. As a language, Kalmyk developed on the basis of Oirat, which was characterized in the following manner: 'Vitality, an unusual conciseness, a wonderful dexterity and an ebullience of lively conversation of the Oirats fully expressed their turbulent and energetic life and vigilance against enemy attacks.'[3] In the Kalmyk language the stress is always placed on the final syllable.

The Kalmyk script

For over four centuries the Kalmyks possessed their own script, which was called the 'clear script' (*togo bichig*). It was created in the middle of the seventeenth century by the great educator Zaya-Pandita, who adapted the Uighur-Mongolian alphabet to the peculiarities of the Oirat language. For example, in the old Uighur-Mongolian script the five vowels expressed no fewer than seven sounds, and the seventeen consonants corresponded to a considerably greater number of sounds. Long vowels in this script were rendered by two and sometimes by three letters, which was very difficult both for writing a text and for reading it. After the reform of the script each grapheme of the 'clear script' was given a single phonetic value. In this Zaya-Pandita devised practically no new graphemes but somewhat modified old letters and introduced new diacritical marks.[4] A biographer of Zaya-Pandita wrote of him as the creator of an Oirat script: 'The significance of Zaya-Pandita as an educator of his native land was great: the composition of a special alphabet for the Oirats, communicating all sounds and nuances of everyday speech, drew together the written and spoken languages, supplanted artificial sounds in words and grammatical forms – which had been present in the script of the Mongolian language and had formerly been in common use and accepted throughout the whole of the heterogeneous Mongolian family – and enabled their literature to stand on its own two feet.'[5]

In the 'clear script' have been preserved a unique literature with both religious and secular content, and historical chronicles used for record-keeping in the Kalmyk khanate. At the beginning of the twentieth century all educated people could write in the 'clear script', which later began to be called either the old script or the Zaya-Pandita writing. The 'clear script', which was taught in school and *khurul*s, was used for diaries and personal correspondence. The Oirats' literary heritage – Oirat manuscripts and woodcuts – are concentrated in Kalmykia in three depositories in Elista: in the scientific archive of the Kalmyk Institute for Humanitarian Research, in the national archive of the Republic of Kalmykia and in the Kalmyk Republic's local history museum named in honour of N. Pal'mov.[6]

Language and alphabet

The Kalmyks are Buddhists but the Buddhists' ritual language is Tibetan. A significant amount of Buddhist literature, from prayer books to theological texts, was translated into the old script used by the Kalmyks right up to the 1920s. In 1924 a decision was taken to create a new Kalmyk alphabet on the basis of the Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet, with the addition of several supplementary letters. Then in 1928 a reform was carried out with a new script. Two years later an alphabet based on Latin was introduced. In 1938 it was again changed into an alphabet with a Russian base, though the new variant differed from the two previous ones. Finally, in 1941 new alterations were

adopted, as a result of which there was finally formed the fourth of the alphabets on a Russian base, or the sixth in all, if one takes into account all the alphabets that were changed one for another in the course of two decades. As a result of this linguistic chopping and changing two generations of Kalmyks were practically alienated from written communication in their native language and from the national literature that had absorbed centuries of the people's linguistic creativity and had served as a source for its further development.

The Kalmyks had in the past been nomads. The giving up of an extensive form of pastoral economy and the forced transition to a settled way of life implies a renunciation of everything traditional – economy, transport, settlement, dwellings, utensils – and also leads to a loss of the part of the lexicon that reflects the people's economy and way of life.

Active contacts between the Kalmyk and Russian populations began after the colonization of the Kalmyk steppes by Ukrainian and Russian peasants, which commenced in the seventeenth century and was especially active in the eighteenth century. Kalmyks who found themselves in continual contact with Russians successfully mastered the Russian language. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century it was not a rare phenomenon to find Kalmyks who could make themselves understood in Russian. For the majority of Kalmyk serfs who grew up and lived far from their native nomadic territories – since in this period it was fashionable for the Moscow and St Petersburg gentry to keep at home serfs of Kalmyk extraction – Russian became their mother tongue. Alexander S. Pushkin, during his journey to the Caucasus, had the opportunity to visit a Kalmyk yurt. He properly perceived that its residents not only understood him completely but could also make themselves understood to him in Russian.[7]

In 1920 Soviet power was proclaimed in Kalmykia. The internationalist doctrine of the ruling party – the All-Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks – was imperial in essence and actively inculcated the Russian language in social life: meetings, conferences, documents and the press were basically in Russian. Whereas prior to the revolution Kalmyk–Russian linguistic contacts had been primarily of an individual and oral character, in the years of Soviet power, especially in the years after the deportation, Kalmyk–Russian interaction led to the younger and middle generations speaking Russian well, whereas the older generation could make themselves understood in Russian. Hence, according to statistics from the all-Union census of 1929, 0.7 per cent of the total Kalmyk population spoke Russian, but in 1979 it was 85.3 per cent of the population.[8]

Those years opened up a cultural 'window on to Europe', which started from Moscow and the Russian language. An unfamiliar world unexpectedly opened up to the Kalmyks: it was interesting and attractive, it carried knowledge and the possibility of careers, and it seemed equitable, as it proclaimed equality for all people as one of its fundamental principles. It has to be noted that there was no alternative proletarian culture among the people.

It is also important that among the Kalmyks education was traditionally regarded as prestigious and was encouraged for both men and women. However, under Soviet power the sole avenue for receiving such an education – particularly in a situation of artificial alienation from their own literary culture – was the Russian language.

In December 1943 the Kalmyks were punished and banished 'forever' to Siberia, Central Asia and Sakhalin. Here, for thirteen years in dispersed settlements a generation grew up for which, perhaps, their own language remained their mother tongue but Russian had already become the language of childhood. At the same time it also became the language of survival, and for the children it was also partially the language of social rehabilitation.

After the restoration of an autonomous Kalmykia in 1957 – in the mood of euphoria that arose from their political rehabilitation, return to their homeland, new optimistic prospects for development and a future that seemed to be without problems – no special attention was paid to the native language. Facilitating this was the managerial role of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had proclaimed as its aim a new historical community – the Soviet people which had *de facto* come into being – but within which the language of inter-ethnic intercourse was Russian. There was no assumption that there would be knowledge of the Kalmyk language in the future. Of special significance in this context were ethno-psychological characteristics of the ethnic group: inherent in the Kalmyk mentality are thought processes allowing the legitimacy of totalitarianism and a political indifference that did not allow them to ponder on problems of the people as a nation, since the ruling party had announced that there were no such problems.

The contemporary linguistic situation

When did the Kalmyks switch over to speaking primarily in Russian? Sociological research shows that this took place in the 1960s.[9] Siberian children who had returned to their homeland as adults were already conversing with their own children at home in Russian. Meanwhile, in Kalmykia 74.7 per cent of Kalmyk children up to ten years old either considered Russian as their native language or spoke it fluently, but by the age of fifteen this percentage had risen to 98.3 per cent.[10]

An opportunity to see ignorance of the native language as a social problem arose among the Kalmyks at the time of *perestroika*. Formed in 1989, the National Front of Kalmykia did not become a mass movement and its ranks disbanded after a year. But it was its leaders who sounded the alarm on the dying life of the Kalmyk language, imparting a political flavour to a linguistic problem.

The degree to which people at present have no command of the Kalmyk language within Kalmykia is critical. According to materials from a statistical ethnographic investigation of the Kalmyks that was undertaken in 1985 by the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology of the Academy of

Sciences of the USSR (nowadays called the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences), together with the Kalmyk Scientific Research Institute of History, Philology and Economics (currently renamed the Kalmyk Institute for Applied Research in the Humanities), a third of the respondents questioned in an urban setting spoke their native tongue with difficulty and of those (57 per cent) who spoke it fluently only 27 per cent both read and wrote in Kalmyk. In villages the situation is more favourable: 16 per cent had difficulty with the language and the remainder spoke fluently, and 46 per cent of them read and wrote in Kalmyk. It was ascertained that 49–50 per cent of those aged between sixteen and twenty-nine had a fluent command of the language, 14–18 per cent of the young people spoke it with difficulty and a basic conversational knowledge was noted among 10–17 per cent of the respondents. At the same time, 84–86 per cent of young people resident in a village replied affirmatively to the question 'Would you like to perfect your knowledge of the Kalmyk language?' – which raises doubt about the adequacy of the answers cited above. Apparently, a notion of ethnic self-stereotypes at times compels one to impart what is desired on to the reality and not to confess to the interviewer a worse command of the language than is in fact the case. This is confirmed by questions connected with the sphere of functioning of the Kalmyk language in a youth milieu: from 1 to 8 per cent of village inhabitants conversed at home in their native language, and between 5 and 20 per cent in both Russian and Kalmyk. In a hypothetical situation, as a language for use in a public speech, twenty-nine out of 354 respondents aged up to and including thirty chose their native tongue: this was one in twelve. In reality, among young respondents it was shown that only 4 to 5 per cent had a command of their native language best of all, and those who knew both languages to an equal degree accounted for 3 per cent of people aged between sixteen and nineteen years, 53 per cent of those aged between twenty and twenty-four and 54 per cent of those aged from twenty-five to twenty-nine. This is not surprising, since those who received an education in their own native language are primarily people who are older than fifty-five.

The cited survey material reflects the moods and ethnic situation in the spring of 1985, at the very beginning of *perestroika*, when mass consciousness was still thoroughly permeated by the ideological dogmas of historical materialism. Four years later the Kalmyk Institute of Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences conducted similar, but more narrowly socio-linguistic, research in rural districts of the republic, the total number sampled amounting to 2098 people. The research showed the following: at meetings 76 per cent stood up to speak in Russian, and barely 2 per cent in Kalmyk. Of the Kalmyk population, 59 per cent speak and socialize in Russian. Of those aged up to thirty, no more than 10 per cent speak Kalmyk. However, despite their own linguistic incompetence, 77.9 per cent of Kalmyk respondents acknowledged Kalmyk as their mother tongue, 2.5 per cent

Figure 4.1 Kalmyks of the older generation. Photo: Mergen Bembinov.

considered Russian to be their native language and 9.9 per cent said that they had two native languages.[11]

Methods for teaching the Kalmyk language are not very effective, especially in the city, where children study it for ten years but the results are normally miserable. Final year students frequently speak a foreign language with more confidence than their own. It is not coincidental that, even in 1985, 71 per cent of respondents who were urban residents would have liked to improve their knowledge of the Kalmyk language.

An expression of concern for the departure of Kalmyk speech from everyday life is well expressed by a poet:

> I am tormented by a disaster affecting all:
> All the more rarely is heard my native tongue.
> In our paternal home has begun to die
> A language so dear, like father and mother,
> Murmuring, like a spring among the sands,
> Now, like withered grasses, is wilted.[12]

In December 1993 ethno-sociological research was conducted in the Kalmyk republic under the auspices of the project 'Pre-election Russia'.[13] There are some interesting data from this survey. Out of 502 surveyed Kalmyks, both rural and urban residents, 94 per cent acknowledged Kalmyk as their native language and 5.2 per cent Russian. Replies by these respondents to the

question 'How fluently do you speak the Kalmyk language?' were distributed in the following manner:

I think [in Kalmyk]	5%
I speak it fluently	36.5%
I speak it with difficulty	38.8%
I speak it with great difficulty	14.1%
I don't speak it at all	5.6%

Kalmyk was the first language for 44.4 per cent of the Kalmyks surveyed and Russian for 55 per cent. What is noticeable is a general tendency for the native language to be used within a Kalmyk family: with their father 43.6 per cent conversed in Kalmyk and 49.2 per cent in Russian; correspondingly with their mother 45 per cent spoke in Kalmyk and 52.2 per cent in Russian. With their wife or husband 18.9 per cent of the surveyed Kalmyks conversed in Kalmyk and 58.4 per cent in Russian. In chatting with their own children 16.5 per cent used Kalmyk and 58.2 per cent Russian.

The adoption of the law 'On languages in the Kalmyk ASSR', despite the legally equal status of the Russian and Kalmyk languages, was considered as a raising of the status of Kalmyk, which until then under Soviet power had never been a state language. A model for the bill was a version of the decree on the state status of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan. However, in the discussion about the law there were opponents to the proposed wording. Hence a national writer of Kalmykia, Alexei Balakayev, considered that only Kalmyk should be the state language of Kalmykia and to Russian should be assigned a role as a language of international communication. The writer raised an objection against a blind imitation of another republic, since in our republic a unique situation has taken shape. 'Kalmykia is regarded as an ecological disaster zone, so we have to announce as a disaster too the loss of the Kalmyk language in connection with the thirteen-year sojourn in various regions of Siberia and the Far East. The dislocation that has befallen the people is reflected in the development of the Kalmyk language and culture. In the first place, with no offence intended to other nations of the republic, we must recognize Kalmyk as the state language.'[14]

In accordance with the draft law on languages, what was envisaged was a step-by-step introduction of Kalmyk as a functioning language and as a language for business use in government-controlled institutions, the civil service and public organizations.[15] A 'Programme for the revival and development of Kalmyk as a state language' was created. It is clear from it that the drafting and passing of acts by organs of state power and administration should have been implemented in Kalmyk with a translation into Russian. It made provision for a transition, within Kalmykia, to the conducting of criminal, civil and administrative cases in Kalmyk (as the republic's state language), in the official Russian and in a language acceptable to those

taking part in the cases. In the Programme of the Council of Ministers a goal was put forward: to provide for the introduction of routine work in either Kalmyk or Russian in the courts, at notary offices, in district, city, township and village councils of People's Deputies, and at public registry offices.

For any adult, for a positive self-awareness of personhood, it is important to have linguistic and cultural continuity, which should be accompanied by a high valuation of one's language and culture. However, national self-awareness at present is insufficiently developed for positive action. In such conditions the need to protest against the loss of one's native language (which for a long time had been regarded by Soviet science as a 'primordial' or basic element in ethnic identity) in the context of an extremely inhospitable social landscape can lead to complexes within the personality and outside it, in the sphere of everyday life and even in the realm of inter-ethnic relationships.

In the 1990s the borders of the republic were more widely opened to Kalmyks living in Germany, France and the USA. These were children and grandchildren of the first wave of émigrés. One of the problems in their mixing socially with their relatives in Kalmykia was a linguistic one: not all the guests knew Russian but almost all of them knew Kalmyk, and at the same time far from all the hosts spoke their native language fluently enough for meaningful social interaction.

In recent years there has been a wave of migrants into the Republic from the historical native land of the Oirats, the ancestors of the Kalmyks: from Jungaria, nowadays the Xinjiang-Uighur autonomous district of the People's Republic of China. They are primarily descendants of Volga Kalmyks who had departed from Russia with Ubushi Khan in 1771. They are being driven to the Volga by an 'inherited' nostalgia and also by a fear of Han acculturation and of demographic policies in China. In contrast with the Kalmyks of Russia, their brothers in China lack even a fictive autonomy, living in barely accessible mountain districts, but they have preserved their language and the old writing system – the 'clear script' – and many other elements of traditional culture (dwellings, food, folklore, religion and, in part, a traditional economy). Nevertheless, it is difficult for many of them to receive a higher education, and there are no prospects for the creative intelligentsia – unlike in the Republic of Kalmykia. After receiving Russian citizenship, the Xinjiang Kalmyks have revived the linguistic problem. Being for the most part members of the creative intelligentsia – artists, journalists and scholars – they have sought to help to reanimate Kalmyk in the social life of the republic. Having organized a terminological commission under presidential auspices, these scholars have taken on the work of replacing borrowed and clearly traced words on the basis of a common Mongolian lexicon. Now such words as 'culture', 'lesson', 'hotel' or 'student' have been replaced by pan-Mongolian synonyms that have been quite organically integrated into the modern Kalmyk language; previously in Kalmyk they had sounded just like in Russian. However, as outsiders, it is difficult for them

to take into account the fact that the Kalmyk language in Kalmykia has continued on its way for 220 years. Linguistic divergence cannot but make itself felt. Therefore many proposals and interpretations of specific words are perceived by speakers of the language in Kalmykia as archaic or artificial; that is why they are not infrequently discarded in linguistic practice. Understanding has not been stimulated by their taking up the question of returning to the old script. Attractive as this idea is at first glance, it could merely deepen what, even without it, is not a simple situation in terms of the knowledge and usage of the Kalmyk language. Taken altogether, to a significant extent this has lowered the fruitfulness of this interesting and indisputably useful cooperation.

In 1992 a state programme to revive the Kalmyk language was adopted by the republic's Council of Ministers. It was carried out primarily in the sphere of education. It is here that the efforts of enthusiasts – scholars, headteachers of schools and the teaching staff of schools and kindergartens – are noticeable, but these efforts, connected with the persistence of the teaching staff, did not become as widely drawn in by the system as had been stipulated in the state programme.

Linguistic policy in the new Kalmykia

On 12 April 1993 Kalmykia became a presidential republic. The first President of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, in his pre-election programme, for which the republic's population voted, wrote: 'The study and spread of the Kalmyk and Russian languages will enjoy the utmost support of the state.'[16] Characterized by the central press as 'a Kalmyk who is more Russian than a Russian', the President of Kalmykia has turned down ethnic nationalism as an ideology, placing his bets on a civil nationalism. He gives speeches in the republic only in Russian, setting an appropriate example to other speakers. A series of changes – appellations in the Kalmyk language have been removed from titles of the republic, and the republic's national anthem has been translated into Russian – have been met with understanding by Kalmyks and impressed the remainder of the republic's inhabitants, strengthening civic harmony in Kalmykia.

In April 1994 a new basic law was adopted in the republic, the 'Code of the Steppe', in which once more the state status of the Kalmyk and Russian languages in Kalmykia was reaffirmed. The Kalmyk language, as mentioned in the Code, is a basis for national self-awareness of the Kalmyk people. Its revival, preservation, growth and expansion among users are priority goals of the organs of power of the Kalmyk Republic (article 18).[17]

At present a new programme of revival and development of Kalmyk as a state language is being worked out. The necessity to adopt such a programme is due to the fact that Kalmykia is rapidly becoming a national republic that is not speaking its own national language – and now each year of delay could become fatal for the Kalmyk language. At present the authors

of the programme depict the linguistic situation as follows: today practically none of the indigenous population speak in their native language; neither in the sphere of state administration nor in social-political activities is the Kalmyk language functioning, and its usage is also limited within the domains of national education, mass communication, spiritual culture and service industries.[18] Moreover, with each passing year there grows among a certain sector of the people a so-called 'linguistic nihilism' – an ignorance of, and unwillingness to learn, the native language – and such an attitude is especially prevalent among the teenage generation.

Success in the emergency measures being taken to revive and develop the Kalmyk language within the republic largely depends on the following factors:

- a growth in national self-awareness, and interest and effort by people at large to broaden the functions of their native tongue;
- legislative strengthening of a linguistic equality of rights, imparting to the Kalmyk language a state status, plus the manifestation of a social vision for using the native language in all spheres of life;
- the presence of traditions of teaching the Kalmyk language as a subject of study, and its use as a language of instruction;
- academic research with the aim of broadening the social functions of the language, including the publication in the language of literature, study books, dictionaries, grammars, phrase-books and so on.

The state programme for the revival and development of the language has hit serious difficulties, caused by, for example, the absence of:

- networks of national schools and colleges;
- systems of education that teach about the linguistic situation and constitutional and demographic aspects;
- a dictionary of reference literature;
- qualified staff;
- appropriate study programmes.

The programme is intended to provide an orderly system of tuition in Kalmyk, with thorough study leading to mastery; it envisages the training of academic and teaching staff, the development of literature, sciences and arts, television and radio broadcasting, the publication of books, newspapers and journals in Kalmyk and the production of dictionaries, study-books and teaching methodology literature.

In this programme the intention is to create a structure to enable Kalmyk to function as a state language: the government of the Kalmyk Republic should create a committee for the development and perfection of the Kalmyk language, charged with the task of determining the general direction of linguistic policy and linguistic structuring, as well as resolving actual questions of script, orthography, terminology etc.

In accordance with the law 'On languages', Kalmyk as a working language and a language for routine business within the public sector, the civil service and social organizations should have been introduced in stages since 1995. However, this has not happened. The actual linguistic situation is such that, in the absence of language resources, the conducting of business in Kalmyk at the present time is impossible.

The ethno-demographic and social composition of the republic's population, the structural development of the native language, the level of development of its branches of terminology and the exceedingly limited functioning of the language mean that it is not yet feasible to translate into Kalmyk all documentation or every work of an educational, statistical, financial or technical design nature, or to carry out teaching in the native language in secondary schools or in specialist, professional, technical and higher education establishments. Even tuition in schools is possible only within the confines of primary education. There are no prospects for using the language in the realm of scientific research; this is possible only in the field of Kalmyk philology.

Most important at present is to teach the native language, actively to disseminate and promote it and to encourage an aspiration to study the native language not only by Kalmyks but also by representatives of other nationalities, especially people whose specialities or responsibilities involve working with people – for example, doctors, teachers and those working in law enforcement agencies, in commerce or in the service sector.

A general line of development of national-linguistic relations in the contemporary period consists of a maximal dissemination of the language and its introduction into various spheres of mass communication:

- the organization of short courses for studying the Kalmyk language within various institutions within Kalmykia;
- the working out and publication of basic word-lists for workers in different branches of the economy and culture.

In accordance with the programme, everywhere enterprises and organizations should introduce, at their own expense, among their complement of staff members the posts of translators, teachers of the Kalmyk language and stenographers. In transport and in institutions and organizations whose work is connected with services to the general public there should be provision for enquiry or information services in both Kalmyk and Russian.

One of the fundamental principles of linguistic policy is considered to be the voluntary nature of study and a renunciation of the compulsory study of any particular language.

In February 1995 in Elista a seminar-consultation took place on 'Revival of the Kalmyk nation'. State Councillor V. N. Ilyumzhinov in the keynote speech 'On the state programme of rebirth and development of the Kalmyk people' emphasized that the previous administrative command system of

government regarded 'as of paramount importance a national-state structure and rebirth of the regions based on economic grounds. In our view, adherence to positions of economic determinism is one of the huge errors of the former and current leadership.'[19] 'We are trying in every way possible to get out of this schema, having chosen another strategy – primarily the strategy of socio-cultural rebirth of the nation. Kalmyk literature, folklore, the revival of the language and culture, of spirituality and mentality: all these are of the greatest priority. The principal and most important direction of this strategy is the marketing of educational services.'[20]

The linguistic realities of youth

Let us peruse materials from ethno-sociological research conducted in 1997 in Elista and other capitals of Russian republics as part of the joint international scientific project entitled 'Ethno-linguistic concepts of youth'. Those surveyed in the capital of Kalmykia were 800 schoolchildren and students of lycées, colleges and polytechnics of various nationalities according to the ethnic composition of the republic's population. The subject of the research was Kalmyk youth – teenagers born in 1979–80. They mainly lived in Elista, and the majority had spent their childhood here, with only 17 per cent from rural locations and 8 per cent from small towns.

One of the most common indicators of ethnic self-awareness is the native language, which in Soviet social studies had been determined as the language of ethnic affiliation. Kalmyk was acknowledged as the native language by 85 per cent of the surveyed Kalmyks, Russian by 13 per cent and both languages by 2 per cent. Of these, Kalmyk was the first language (that is, the one first learned and the language of everyday conversation) for only 6 per cent, and Russian was the first language for 92.8 per cent of the Kalmyks surveyed. Two per cent of the respondents said that in their childhood their parents had conversed in both of these languages. Nevertheless, in real life the teenagers communicated with their parents basically in Russian. Only four people, for example, spoke with their fathers in Kalmyk and fifteen people in both languages. The remaining 354 Kalmyks who ended up in the sample preferred to communicate exclusively in Russian. It was the same in conversation with their mothers: six people used Kalmyk and fifteen conversed in both languages. The remaining 399 boys and girls talked with their mothers only in Russian. So, if the generation of the parents of today's teenagers belong to the generation of Siberian children – that is, children born in Siberia and other places of the Kalmyk people's deportation – who know the native language poorly and prefer Russian in family conversations, could it be that the teenagers' grandmothers converse with their grandchildren in Kalmyk? Statistics from the survey demonstrate the following: 14 per cent of teenagers talk in Kalmyk with their grandmothers on the father's side and 20 per cent with their maternal grandmothers. The respective figures for those who converse in Russian are 45 per cent and 46 per

cent, and in a mixed Kalmyk–Russian diglot 5 per cent and 7 per cent. One teenager conversed with a personal friend in Kalmyk, and a fifth of the sample did so in both languages; the remainder spoke with one another only in Russian. The survey materials underline the fact that practically all primary communicative and other functions have gone over to Russian, the expansion of which in Kalmyk society began in the early years of Soviet power, and the positions were fixed in the years of the deportation. This is demonstrated by the following answers to the question, 'How fluently do you speak Kalmyk?':

I think and speak it fluently	7.6% of the surveyed young people
I speak it with difficulty	37%
I speak it with great difficulty	33.3%
I don't speak it at all	22%

Balancing this, at the same time 98 per cent of these teenagers think and speak fluently in Russian.

Compared with the 1993 survey of both adults and younger people, with both urban and rural respondents, this survey of predominantly urban youth indicates a much higher proportion of those who speak Kalmyk with great difficulty or not at all. However, one cannot say that the younger generation does not experience any need for the Kalmyk language: only 10 per cent of them did not express a wish to raise the level of their command of their native language; the others are impeded from enrolling in courses – as linguistic resources in the city are practically non-existent – by the absence of suitable conditions (27 per cent) or insufficient time (49 per cent). Only 2 per cent of respondents had nevertheless found both the time and opportunity to enrol in Kalmyk language courses, which were unable to teach the language themselves but could only share some skills in speaking it. Those active supporters of the Kalmyk language (2 per cent) 'very often watch programmes on Kalmyk television in the Kalmyk language', whereas 7 per cent of the rest of the respondents did so 'often', 42 per cent 'sometimes', 34 per cent 'rarely' and 14 per cent 'never'.

Language and the sphere of education

The most socially significant sphere for linguistic development is education. It is right here that an individual's linguistic competence is formed, which creates the preconditions for the language in various domains of social interaction. Moreover, the sphere of education is a fundamental channel for the formation of one's native language. Besides, here is concentrated a socially promising and forward-looking group of the populace – the youth. Taking all these factors into account, one must add that the formation of nationality-sensitive systems of education is required for the study of the native language to become a component of education and a basic aim in the

field of education from the point of view of preserving and developing languages. The formation of policy in the sphere of education is supposed to be an integral part of the government's linguistic policy.

To aid the revival of a nationality-sensitive system of education and to put into practice new teaching methods (as a concrete contribution to the realization of a state programme of revival of the Kalmyk language), a number of the republic's schoolteachers have been awarded the Republic of Kalmykia's President's Prize. The content of education is becoming an integral and priority part of state policy. In this connection new courses and subjects have been introduced in schools, aimed at the rebirth of the language and culture: creative works of the people, the old Kalmyk writing system *todo bichig*, traditions and ways of life. It is important that, in the creation of a multiplex education system and the rooting of schools in a national-ethnic soil, the independent quest by innovative teachers should by no means destroy the broad range of unified education in the Republic of Kalmykia.

For the first time after thirty-two years of closure, in 1995 sixty-seven national classes with tuition in the Kalmyk language, eighty-three Kalmyk-medium nursery groups in establishments for pre-school tuition, two national kindergartens with an emphasis on aesthetics, three ethnic craft studios and so far one national school (in the village of Ul'dyuchiny) were opened. Specially earmarked financing for national education, begun in 1993, was suspended in 1994; however, the rating of national classes within the republic had already become so high that, despite all the methodological and financial difficulties, the Ministry of Education has received about fifty applications for the opening of new classes with tuition in the national language from various places in the republic.[21]

In the 1990s two types of national schools were operating in Kalmykia. Schools with tuition in Russian, implementing the teaching of Kalmyk as one of their subjects, were in the majority and had been operating for more than thirty years. As experience shows, this kind of school, which had kept just one indication of belonging to the Kalmyk nation – namely, the teaching of the Kalmyk language – turned into an instrument of destruction in relation to Kalmyk culture, and in a number of cases became a direct reason for a deep rejection of the national culture.[22]

In recent years a second type of national school has been formed within the republic, with teaching in the native language and the curriculum in accord with that of the national schools, with tuition in Russian, but a reduction in the hours of Russian language in the national stream. Such schools are especially marked by the way in which the native language is taught every day in classes one to four, thereby allowing the development of spoken Kalmyk.

The contemporary linguistic situation in these schools preserves a level of everyday usage of the language out of touch with a general system of education in national traditions, culture and customs. In 1990 there were more

than fifty such schools. Therefore a qualitatively new type of school was essential, which was equipped to provide a spiritual-moral and general cultural revival of the ethnic group. This is possible with the tuition of all subjects in the native language, especially in primary classes. Such schools had been planned from 1993, but at present only one actually exists.

Since the degree of knowledge of a language depends on which language is used in childhood, since 1995 a new linguistic policy in relation to pre-school children's establishments has been proposed. So, in the period from 1995 to 1997 there were proposals to open kindergartens and groups with a deepening of tuition of the Kalmyk language, to provide them with qualified staff and to introduce tuition of Kalmyk to children everywhere in pre-school establishments, with further continuation of it in classes one and two.

Language and the mass media

A large role in the accomplishment of this programme is carried out by the mass media. A basic goal of this part of the programme is the broadening of the sphere of functioning of the native language in the mass media and the creation of favourable conditions for it.

The number of copies of publications in Kalmyk printed by publishers in the republic in 1995 was as follows: *Khal'mg Unn* (Kalmyk truth), 5600 copies, five times a week; the children's magazine *Bair* (Joy), 12,500 copies, once a week; the social-political and literary magazine *Teegin gerl* (Light in the steppe), 2000 copies, in two languages. This same level has been maintained to the present day.

It is in the mass media that there occurs a daily cultivation and consolidation of a basic form of existence of the language as a means of communication. Through the mass media it is vital to spread knowledge of the native language, to raise its social prestige and to facilitate its mastery by all the republic's population. For this the programme had envisaged, beginning in 1995, the showing of films in Kalmyk, the organization of a studio for creating educational and cartoon films in Kalmyk, the provision of simultaneous translation, by means of subtitles, of the most significant socio-political and artistic broadcasts on the republic's television and a broadening of the subject matter of television and radio broadcasts in Kalmyk for children. In every way possible it intended to encourage and support financially the output of newspapers, magazines and books in Kalmyk, and to organize an academic publication of a Kalmyk grammar, an encyclopaedia called 'Kalmyk language' and a specialist magazine called 'Native language'.[23]

In the programme the revival of the Kalmyk people, as one of the problems demanding all-embracing scientific elaboration, finds its expression in the problem of preserving and developing the Kalmyk language. A linguistic policy has to guarantee free development and the preservation of a full functioning of the languages of national minorities within the republic. At the moment in Kalmykia there are ethnic classes working in the Kazakh,

Dargin and Chechen languages. In the view of the document's author, the essence of reviving and developing the Kalmyk language appears to lie in the creation of appropriate political, economic, legal and social conditions. Needed for this are:

- A widening of the sphere of usage of the Kalmyk language, especially in its social and cultural functions. At present the amount of television transmission in Kalmyk has grown to 300 hours per year, and of radio transmissions to 320 hours.
- A broadening of the sphere of application of the language with the creation of all necessary conditions for introducing their native language to the younger generation and for developing a functioning and fully valued Russian–Kalmyk bilingualism.

The tasks of language building require serious academic provision. It is essential to elucidate and to trace out in detail regularities and tendencies in the linguistic life of the region. Both fundamental and applied research on the Kalmyk language is necessary, which will help a purposeful and more rational resolution of questions of linguistic policy.

For a broadening of the functional sphere of the Kalmyk language it is vital to create a modern terminological base (lexical bank) in many branches of knowledge and production. The composition of dictionaries of various types is carried out on the basis of general and specific theories of lexicology and lexicography, on principles of composing national-Russian and Russian-national dictionaries that were worked out by scientists of the former Soviet Union, and also on the basis of lexicographical norms and standards existing in contemporary science and practice. In the compilation of dictionaries for terminological branches, it is proposed that maximum use should be made of internal resources of the Kalmyk and other Mongolian languages, and also international scientific and scientific-technical terminology.

The need to revive the Kalmyk language, widening the sphere of its functioning, the further development of national culture and problems in preserving the uniqueness of the Kalmyk people demand a comprehension of the critical situation that has befallen the native language, education and culture. The restoration of the status of Kalmyk as a state language is a factor in its revival and in the development of national culture and the self-preservation of the Kalmyk people.

For a fully fledged use of the national language as a means for child-rearing and tuition it is necessary to have the presence of a full complement of educational, methodological and popular literature in Kalmyk throughout all subjects and step by step throughout all levels of general educational schools.

Implementation of the law on languages in Kalmykia will be accomplished in a complicated ethno-linguistic situation, in which a fundamental problem is that of the survival of the language of the titular nationality. In

accordance with this, the chief focus in existing conceptualizations of linguistic policy is on the realm of national education, the system of national schools.

A new step in the state's linguistic policy was the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kalmykia on the social reanimation of the old Kalmyk script. Undoubtedly the penetration of the 'old script', as it is called in popular parlance, will be a major improvement in the development of Kalmyk culture and an important factor in the reinforcement of ethnic self-awareness. However, the question turns on the feasibility of the introduction of 'the old script' into modern life, in which the place of the Kalmyk language in social life, especially in its written form, is, unfortunately, insignificant.

5 Traditional economy and dwelling

> In traditional society a Kalmyk family was considered poor if it owned just three horses, five cows and no more than twenty sheep.[1]

Economy and environment

Geographical conditions had a great influence on the economic development of the Kalmyk people. Vast steppes in the Volga and Don basins and the area north of the Caucasus, with their verdant meadows and lush pastures, favoured the development of an economy based on livestock herding. The dominant sector of the Kalmyks' economy was nomadic pastoralism. This nomadic mode of production was a highly integrated system in which economy, social relationships and socio-cultural stereotypes were tightly intertwined. Nomadism played a pivotal and systematic role in the Kalmyks' livelihood and economic decision-making. It determined not only the nature of the development of other economic pursuits but also the dynamism and rhythm of Kalmyk social history, lifestyles, material culture, spiritual life and so on.

A fundamental feature of nomadic pastoralism is the keeping of cattle at grass throughout the year. This was conditioned by the low productivity and uneven distribution of steppe vegetation and by the way in which it was not feasible to store fodder or to keep the animals stalled. The low productivity of available fodder determined the mobile nature of nomadic life by necessitating migratory movement in search of fresh pastures. It also brought about a requirement for large areas of pasture lands. Whereas in normal circumstances a sheep needs five to seven hectares of steppe pasture per year, a horse needs no fewer than twenty hectares.[2] Hence an inadequacy of grass and water supplies, plus a shortage of herbage owing to its uneven and seasonal distribution, gave rise to a continual need for periodic changes in the pasture land used and a search for further fodder. As a result there developed a nomadic livestock-based economy and a mobile lifestyle.

Depending on the specific conditions, the territories used as pasturelands by the Kalmyks were used either during the winter or in the summer. The

distribution of winter pastures was orientated to satisfying the food requirements of sheep: this was determined by the length of time the ground was covered by snow and the character of the snow cover, which should not exceed ten to twelve centimetres in depth. The crucial factor in the choice of summer pastures was the availability of water sources along the entire migration route to furnish the cattle with an even supply of water. Judging by eighteenth-century sources, Kalmyk nomads practised a meridional type of seasonal migration. As winter pastures they used the so-called Black Lands (*Khar Gazr*). P. S. Pallas describes the seasonal migrations as follows: 'In winter, Kalmyks together with their herds roam in the southern part of the Volga steppe and along the coast of the Caspian. Alongside the Caspian Sea they have sufficient rush to use as fuel, instead of firewood, and there is so little snow there that the animals themselves can find grazing in the fields. When spring comes, they begin gradually moving to the north to use the rich pastures which are left in the hollows once the Volga has receded to within its own banks.'[3] A similar description was given by another eighteenth-century observer of Kalmyk nomadic life, the scholar Ivan Lepekhin: 'Kalmyks own large herds, and do not stock forage for winter because they can use the vast open steppes lying between the Urals and the Volga, from the Caspian Sea in the south to the Samara line of defence forts in the north. In summer they live in the steppe, and in autumn they cross the Volga and roam across the Kuban steppe, starting from the Volga itself and going as far as the river Kuma and further up to the Tsaritsyn line of defences.'[4]

The cattle drive to the Black Lands and back took place along a strictly defined route, along localities with lush grasses and good watering holes. An inherent characteristic of Kalmyks, as also of other nomads, was the so-called 'exclusive' migration cycle, which had strictly regulated routes with the presence of permanent winter camps and summer migrations using the same sources of water. The movement of large herds was made more difficult by the crossing of water barriers, the largest of which was the Volga. According to the descriptions left by witnesses, the crossing took place when the weather was still:

> For this the Kalmyks make their own rafts, on which they take the camels, cows, sheep and small foals, and float across to the opposite bank. As regards the horse herds, the mares, together with the stallions which are already adults, and the two- and three-year old foals, are left to swim by themselves across the river . . . Children and women cross the river on rafts or boats.[5]

Kalmyks, like the Mongols, used rafts made of bundles of reed with inflated skins of sheep and cows fastened to them. Young males swam by themselves holding on to the tails or saddles of swimming horses. This migratory practice continued until the 1920s or 1930s. O. Gorodovikov, who was a shepherd in

his younger years, wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century that the migration is an eternal pursuit of forage for the livestock.

> In spring the herdsman drives his herd to pastures up north, where there is plenty of food for the animals, and where he stays with them until late autumn. Towards winter the steppe becomes bleak. Winds blow over its open expanse. The grass dries out during summer, so the cattle have nothing to eat. One must move down south where grass is still available, so the nomad begins to migrate towards the Manych and even further down, to the lower reaches of the Terek and Kuma rivers.[6]

The range of migratory movement within a season was small, between seven and eighteen kilometres, depending on the condition of the pastures. Only the migrations from the summer to the winter pastures covered large distances, up to 200 km.[7] Kalmyks living between the Volga and the Don gradually worked out a definite order of rotation for the pastures as well as methods and techniques for pasturing the livestock. They had permanent winter pastures from which they moved to spring and summer ones. Kalmyks of the Khosheut *ulus* spent autumn and winter on the right, hilly, bank of the Volga, using pastures that extend as far south as the modern village of Naryn Khuduk, whereas in early spring they crossed to the left bank of the Volga where there were rich meadows. Herders of the Erketen *ulus* wintered near the Sostin lakes, in Mochagi, primarily in the area of the White Lake where the *ulus* headquarters was situated in winter. In summer they moved in a northwesterly direction to use the hollows such as Balbarkha, Mekleta, Sanzyr and Yashkul, and right up to the Elista gully. Those belonging to the Iki-Tsokhur *ulus* spent winter near the Mozhar salt station, along the backwaters and floodplains of the Kuma. After 1860, when, by the new boundaries, the best lands were lost to the Stavropol province, these people spent the winter near the lake of Yashkul, around the Sostin lakes, and along the valley of the Eastern Manych. In summer, the *ulus* roamed around near to Lake Jamtyr or Shara-tolgata, or further north to Lake Tsagan-Nur and along the gullies belonging to the eastern slope of Ergeni.[8] Likewise, there were similarly fixed seasonal migration routes for all the other *ulus*es of the Kalmyk Steppe.

Prior to the second third of the nineteenth century most Kalmyks did not construct houses or stock up food for their livestock. According to a tradition already practised when their ancestors lived in Central Asia, the Kalmyks chose to spend winter in lower localities, in gullies, hollows or basins on the banks of lakes, and also by the rivers Manych and Kuma, in reed brakes where the cattle were protected from cold winds and steppe snow-storms. The same O. I. Gorodovikov wrote in his memoirs that in any weather it was easy to shelter sheep among the reed brakes, and that the herdsman, horse-herder or shepherd hurried to drive his herd there when there was a winter snow storm; it was where sheep gathered in a group while cattle and

horses grazed, continually ambling among the reeds and not breaking away from the herd.[9]

A longstanding tradition helped the Kalmyks to deal with deep snow. First they let out the horse herds, which used their hooves to shovel away the snow and ate the tips of the grass. These were followed by cattle, and the last were sheep and goats, which ate the grass down to the roots.[10]

The geographical factor was crucial in determining the typological structure of the herd.[11] Researchers have long noted how there was always a stable structure in the composition of the animals used by nomads: sheep, goats, horses, camels and cattle.[12] Undoubtedly this given herd structure was conditioned by the adaptive potential of each type of animal. Hence, in an arid zone under conditions of general drought and insufficiency of water resources, it was vitally significant to have a selection of animals whose mode of living required a minimum of water (camels, sheep and goats). A continental climate also determined the selection of types of animal according to the presence of a foraging instinct (horses, sheep and goats).[13] Human needs conditioned the requirement for the animals to have a high productivity in providing meat, milk or wool, and also imparted opportunities for multi-purpose uses, as draught animals or for transport, etc. The balanced character of the herd's structure in terms of animal types was one of the most important forms of the nomads' adaptation to the extreme conditions of their ecological niche. It must be emphasized, however, that under the economic conditions of nomadism no single kind of animal could predominate in the herd. The whole structure was tightly interwoven, with their numerical proportions depending on both environmental conditions and internal functional interrelations.

For the Kalmyks, livestock was the wellspring of their existence and the basis of their economy. An average Kalmyk family owned 60–150 sheep, 10–50 horses, 10–30 cattle and 5–15 camels. Mongols and other Central Asian peoples traditionally bred five kinds of livestock: horses, sheep, cattle, camels, and goats. Among the Kalmyks one of these types of animals – goats – fell out of this series. Always in folklore and epic legends just four kinds of livestock are mentioned, apparently because the economic significance of rearing goats was incomparably less important. A nomad's wealth was evaluated by the number of animals that the person owned. As a Kalmyk proverb puts it, 'He who breeds cattle always eats much butter.' An episode from the Kalmyk *Jangar* epic demonstrates well what animals meant in a Kalmyk's life. When Jangar Bogdo married Zandan Gerel, she was asked by her father what she would like to be given as her dowry. Her reply was simple: 'The most recent offspring of all four species of animals.' The wise men pointed out to the father what his daughter's request implied. The newborn animals would be followed by the females, after them would follow the whole herd and following the livestock would be their owners. The import of the request, implied in the daughter's wish, was that the whole nation should become Jangar's subjects and cross over into his domain.

Figure 5.1 Horses on the Kalmyk steppe. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

Horse breeding

The Kazakh ethnographer N. Masanov gives an exhaustive list of characteristics of the horse from the point of view of livestock breeding. In his opinion, the horse has several positive qualities: a herd instinct, the ability to forage for food under snow, exceptional mobility and endurance, thermoregulation and an ability to fend for itself and to stay out all night without having to be stabled. It is highly productive with an all-round usefulness, being a means of transport and of draught power as well as a source of high meat and milk productivity. However, all these priceless qualities are counterbalanced by other features that make the nomad's life more complicated. The horse requires a large area of grazing land and frequent movements to new pastures, it has a long reproductive cycle (as pregnancy lasts for 48–50 weeks and reproduction is seasonal), sexual maturity is relatively late (coming only at the age of five or six), as is the attainment of their full stature (with growth finishing by the age of six or seven), there is a low proportion of foaling (less than 30 per cent) and a high percentage of miscarriages; they can also shy at water, be fussy about their food and so on.[14]

In the Kalmyk economy the breeding of horses had a variety of purposes: the horse provided meat and fat, milk and kumiss; it was a means of transportation and of energy for pulling loads as well as being a beast of burden. Horse hair was used as a raw material for making ropes, and horse hides went into the production of leather skins for making leather vessels and various kinds of belts and harnesses for horses, oxen and camels. Threads were made of horse tendons. Although every Kalmyk tried to own a horse,

a poor man preferred to keep a mare which would not only be a means of transportation but also supply the family's need for milk, as well as having a foal. Horses were specially loved and valued by the Kalmyks – so much so that they would give up their property for a fine trotter. Over the centuries horse breeding has been one of the leading branches of the economy. In 1803, out of 1,232,808 animals there were 238,330 horses – that is, over 19 per cent of the total.[15] Throughout the whole year horses were put out to grass under the supervision of horse-herds. Sometimes, in cases of a heavy snowfall, they were moved to a night shelter under a roofed or semi-roofed structure, and hay was given to them to eat either off the floor or out of a manger made from wooden planks or reeds.[16]

The basic stock from which the Kalmyk breed was derived were the horses brought to Russia by the ancestors of the Kalmyks at the beginning of the seventeenth century. They were mentioned by P. S. Pallas in the second half of the eighteenth century. Later, their best and largest representatives were crossed with saddle-horses of the Bashkort, Kazakh, Kabardin, Don, Anglo-Arab and Orel breeds.

Horse breeders brought Kalmyk racehorses even to the Paris trade fairs. A fine-looking steed was always prized as an esteemed and special gift. At the turn of the twentieth century, many horse breeders owned huge herds intended for sale to the state for use by the cavalry divisions of the Tsar's army. Horse breeding was a principal area of commerce for those who were particularly wealthy. Hence, in 1909, six large farms owned 76 per cent of all horses.[17] For instance, Prince D. Tundutov each year dispatched 600–700 horses for use by the dragoons and other regiments of the Russian army.

Sheep breeding

Nevertheless, the foundation of the nomadic economy was the breeding of smaller livestock, primarily sheep, which were distinguished by their high productivity and excellent adaptation to the environment. Sheep had a multitude of virtues, both morphological and functional: they did not need much grazing land, were undemanding in their upkeep, made practically complete use of the available food resources, were extremely productive, had herd and foraging instincts and many other features. As disadvantages could be counted a slow speed of movement, the absence of any kind of 'common sense', a vulnerability to predators and so on.

Sheep rearing was one of the main branches of the Kalmyk pastoral economy, with sheep comprising up to 70 per cent of the entire animal stock. Whereas in 1803 the Kalmyks had 767,398 sheep, by 1863 their number had risen to 803,941 or nearly seven per capita of the Kalmyk population.[18] The most common breed was the Kalmyk fat-tailed sheep. Its characteristic features are its tallness, large head and floppy ears. Their long legs enabled Kalmyk sheep to cover large distances and forage under snow on the expanse

of the steppe, and that is why these were the ones that were bred in nomadic and semi-nomadic conditions. They were also bred for their meat. The average live weight of a fat-tailed sheep was roughly between 70 and 90 kg, and sometimes over 115 kg. Kalmyk mutton was marked by its taste, being exceptionally delicious. Its fat, too, was a valuable product, with 11–22 kg of it per carcass.[19] The hair of Kalmyk sheep is long, thick, coarse and curly. Sheep were sheared twice a year, in early summer and in autumn, after first being bathed in running water. In summer, each animal yielded 1.4–2.2 kg of wool. The wool from the autumnal shearing was valued more highly than that from the summer one as usually it was shorter and softer. For this reason, summer hair was normally sold, whereas autumn hair was used for domestic needs.

Kalmyk sheep have flat hooves, so even huge herds did no damage to the fertile topsoil. Although the Kalmyks were deported in 1943, their livestock was confiscated and evacuated as a 'socialist property' in 1942, on the eve of the German invasion. After the Kalmyks' repatriation, and the re-creation of the Kalmyk republic, the problem arose of restoring the livestock herd. Reckoning without ecological consequences, the Soviet authorities purchased sheep in neighbouring Caucasian republics where traditional sheep-breeding had also been practised. However, Caucasian sheep are completely different in that they are adapted to the mountainous environment. First, their hooves have a different shape, being pointed rather than flat, which helps them climb the rocky slopes. Second, they tend to circle around small patches of land until they have eaten up all the grass down to the roots. This doggedness in getting food is useful in the mountains but in the steppe it results in a rapid erosion of the fertile topsoil trampled by the Caucasian sheep's pointed hooves. If one recalls the communist five-year plans, according to which the herd had to increase year by year regardless of the situation, then one can imagine the scale of the degradation of the Kalmyk steppe. Eventually it resulted in the fertile Black Lands becoming the first man-made desert in Europe.

After animal breeding had become commercialized, Kalmyks began breeding merino sheep. The number of fine-fleeced sheep progressively increased during the nineteenth century. In 1904 there were 74,794 of them on the territory of the Large Derbet *ulus* alone, and in 1912 the Astrakhan Kalmyks owned 23,088 merino sheep.[20]

Cattle breeding

Cattle breeding was another important component of the Kalmyk economy. Its extent can be judged from the statistics that in 1863 the Kalmyks owned 143,345 cows, and this had risen to 206,363 by 1909 and to 252,581 in 1916.[21]

The Kalmyk breed of cow, which was recognized as being one of the best in Russia, has been preserved and improved by many centuries of painstaking

daily toil by the Kalmyk people. The rapid increase of the herd was not by chance but was connected with the high demand for so-called Kalmyk 'marble meat' on the Russian market. According to information supplied by the Orenburg Institute of Dairy and Meat Animal Breeding, farm records of the Salsk District and entries in clan records from the prewar period, the Kalmyk cattle had excellent features: whereas the average live weight of a Shorthorn cow was 373.5 kg, and that of the Kazakh cow about 350 kg, an average Kalmyk cow weighed 425 kg. There are recorded cases of some animals weighing between 655 and 776 kg. Once butchered, the weight of the carcass was between 393 and 463 kg, with 51–67 kg of fat.[22] The virtues of Kalmyk cattle were well known: 'With regard to weight and quality of meat, Kyrgyz and Kalmyk cows were considered the best meat cattle out of all the indigenous cattle breeds of the USSR.'[23]

Kalmyk cattle were also distinguished by a high capacity for work. According to various nineteenth-century sources, Russian chumaks (ox-cart drivers who transported fish, salt, and grain) and peasant farmers 'always expressed a preference for Kalmyk bulls which were hardy and were undemanding with regard to food and water'.[24] Despite the fact that the animals were kept on pastures with no dietary supplements, the daily milk yield fluctuated between six and fifteen litres. The milk's fat content was as high as 4.2–4.8 per cent, which made the value of this breed of cattle even higher.[25] According to data provided by the Kalmyk animal breeding station, the average annual milk yield of ten Kalmyk cows has been from 876 to 2180 kg.[26] The slightest improvement in the conditions in which the cattle were kept resulted in noticeable improvement in the weight of fattened animals on natural steppe pastures.

Goat breeding

The Kalmyks kept very few goats, as had already been noticed in the eighteenth century. There were 13,144 goats counted in 1827 but by 1844 their number had increased to 35,694.[27] However, in 1863 the figure dropped again to 12,712, which accounted for just 1.1 per cent of the entire stock of animals.[28] Information on the number of goats is absent from twentieth-century sources. The small number of goats on the Kalmyk steppes was related to the poor quality and small amount of meat on a goat. The hair and skins of goats were seldom used for domestic needs. Compared to sheep, goats are much less capable of finding food under heavy winter snows. Often poor people and farm labourers kept goats for the sake of their milk and offspring, as goats have a rapid reproduction rate. Even at the age of one year a goat gave birth to one kid, and sometimes two or more. Goats were grazed in a flock together with sheep and in poor families were kept around the settlements where the children kept an eye on them. In winter they were kept together with sheep or calves and fed on hay.[29]

Camel breeding

Camels (*temyan*) stand out as being exceptionally adapted to arid and desert climates. The Kalmyks bred Bactrian (two-humped) camels. Among the principal good qualities of a camel that deserve mention are its ability to manage without water or food for prolonged periods, up to ten days, to drink water with a high mineral content and to digest plants such as wormwood and dry thorny bushes, which are inedible to other animals. Camels can also move quickly and have colossal strength, being able to carry an average load of 200–350 kg. Their useful qualities cover a wide spectrum, from transportation and draught purposes to the supply of milk, meat or camel hair: an average camel yields 160–190 kg of meat, 60–100 kg of fat, 4–8 kg of hair and 40–80 buckets of milk from a female camel over a lactation period of 14–16 months. However, a camel also has its drawbacks, including primarily the absence of a foraging instinct, the need for large areas for grazing, a propensity to wander off, the need, when at a waterhole, to take in a large reserve of water (as a single camel can drink as much as 100 litres of water at a time), a low tolerance of cold or rain and a slow reproduction rate (as the length of the gestation period is 13 months, sexual maturity is attained at the age of four and the interval between successive births is two to three years).[30]

Camel meat was especially valued in winter. Their skins were used for making leather vessels and various belts or harnesses for working animals. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, surplus camel hair (i.e. that which was not needed for domestic purposes) was sold to the state and used for making hoods for army officers. Camels were not sheared because enough hair was obtained by simply gathering it when they moulted in early May or June. The Kalmyks supplied camels to the Russian army, where they were used for transportation. So during the 1828–9 war between Russia and Turkey, the government purchased from the Kalmyks, for use by the army in the field, 1000 camels with felt cloths and fully loaded packs as well as 300 camels to be used as transport for the Special Caucasian Corps.[31]

With a continental climate, it was not uncommon for winters to be severe on the Kalmyk steppes. There were heavy losses of livestock on account of deep snow, ice-covered terrain and resulting food shortages. As Kostenkov, a specialist on the Kalmyk steppes, has noted, several thousand animals died of illnesses, snow-storms and starvation each year. Half a million animals perished in the terrible winter of 1798 alone.[32] No sooner had the Kalmyks recovered from their loss than another disaster befell them: in the 1830s they lost nearly half of their livestock again. A. V. Popov, a professor from Kazan University, who visited the Kalmyk steppe at that time, cites official data extracted from the archives of the Chief Administration of the Kalmyk People.[33] This shows that the total number of livestock in 1827 was 803,035 but it dropped to 235,447 in 1837. Table 1 shows the comparative figures for each type of animal.

Table 5.1 Loss of livestock between 1827 and 1837

Year	*Total livestock*	*Camels*	*Horses*	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Goats*
1827	803,035	45,985	160,910	124,690	459,036	12,693
1837	235,447	7,377	19,024	33,308	168,999	6,739

As is clear from Table 1, between 1827 and 1837 the Kalmyks lost about three-quarters of their livestock. Similar catastrophic disasters must have given rise to a Kalmyk proverb: 'To kill a hero, one bullet is enough; to ruin a rich man, one winter's resting place is enough.'

Severe cattle murrain in a short period of time forced the Kalmyks to adopt the practices of their Russian neighbours, whose dairy farming economy was not affected by ecological factors to such an extent. From around about the 1830s the Kalmyks began to stock hay for winter so as to feed the cattle when there was no grass to eat on the pastures. It was also under the influence of the Russians that the Kalmyks were introduced to the raising of pigs and poultry, though neither of these became important in the Kalmyk economy.

Overall, Kalmyk nomadic pastoralism was rigidly dependent on ecological determinants. It could be characterized as multi-purpose and highly productive, oriented both to domestic needs and to market demand. As ecological conditions offered no alternatives to nomadism, a mobile lifestyle always dominated; pastoralism became the totally dominating type of economy and the basic wellspring of existence.

Agriculture

Among the nomadic Kalmyks agriculture occupied a secondary place in the structure of economic activities. The first mention of any such practice among the Kalmyks dates only from the early nineteenth century, and then it was initiated in isolated instances. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, agriculture was developing in various *ulus*es and there was an increase in the number of Kalmyk families who cultivated cereals and grew vegetables and watermelons. Hence, in the Yandyk-Mochagi *ulus*, fifteen families were engaged in arable farming, their fields covering an area of almost 60 acres, and in the Bagatsokhur *ulus* thirteen families owned 186 acres of land, which they used for growing cereals and melons. In the Kharakhus *ulus* ten families were engaged in cereal and melon production on about 94 acres. The number of households engaged in agriculture and the area of sown land were greater in the Maloderbetovsky (Little Derbet) *ulus*, where 65 families had put 1350 acres under cereal and melon cultivation. A further 135 acres were used for growing mustard and 27 acres for tobacco. Once the mustard harvest – over 16,000 kg of it – had been gathered in, the seeds were sold to the Sarepta mustard factory, whereas the tobacco – amounting to over

32,500 kg – was sold either to Kalmyks or to passing traders. Grain was consumed locally.[34]

The Kalmyks' principal agricultural tools included two-shared wooden ploughs and harrows with twenty to thirty quadrilateral iron spikes. Three, or occasionally four, pairs of oxen were harnessed to a wooden plough and four pairs to an iron one. The system of agriculture was the same as that practised in neighbouring Russian villages. Wheat, barley, mustard, oats and millet were sown in spring, and rye in autumn, plus flax in the Maloderbet *ulus*. Sowing was done by hand. Harvesting took place in June and July using scythes (*shalga*) and small wooden rakes. They also used binding machines, which were owned either collectively or individually. Grain was threshed with stone rollers or was crushed under the wheels of carts harnessed to a pair of oxen. Often oxen or horses, whose hooves sped up the threshing process, were tied to the rear of the vehicle. People equipped with pitchforks and rakes picked up the straw that had been threshed and crushed, and brought the lower layer of straw to the top; then the whole process of threshing was repeated from the beginning. The grain was threshed several times in succession and was winnowed with hand-held winnowing-fans. There were few specialized buildings that served as barns or granaries for storing the grain. The hulled grain was kept in leather or canvas sacks.

Kalmyk farmers were obliged to take their grain to neighbouring Russian villages for milling. According to data from Kostenkov, the chief administrator of the Kalmyk people, in spring 1863 the Kalmyks received five hand mills but these were by no means sufficient to meet their needs.[35] Data from the administration of the Kalmyk people showed that in 1904 there were eight mills in Bolshederbetovsky *ulus*, and in 1912 eleven mills were registered in Kalmyk *ulus*es of Astrakhan province. Evidently, this was the reason why Kalmyks continued to use hand mills or to pound grain in mortars right up to the 1920s.[36]

Besides crops grown in fields, the Kalmyks began to practise market gardening. By the mid-nineteenth century they were growing watermelons, melons, tobacco and cabbage. Melon-growing and market gardening were no longer bizarre occupations by the early twentieth century. Moreover, they had become commercialized. Every year Kalmyks sent up to 500 wagons of watermelons to Moscow, St Petersburg and Voronezh. There was some development of horticulture but it had more of an amateur character. In 1887 the number of Kalmyk forest plantations and private fruit gardens came to 53.[37] Pears, apples, cherries and plums were grown in gardens, and there were attempts to cultivate vines.

On the whole, however, agriculture played a subsidiary role; it was combined, as a sideline, with the principal occupation of animal breeding. It was in the north of the Maloderbetovsky *ulus*, especially along the Tikhoretsk–Tsaritsyn railway line, that commercial agriculture began to develop in the first decades of the twentieth century, along with the growth of commercial animal husbandry.

Fishing

The role of fishing was mostly supplementary, the exceptions being the Caspian coast and Lower Volga regions, where fishing played a leading role equal to that of pastoralism. According to official data, in 1909 there were 2051 fishing farms registered in the Yandyk-Mochagi *ulus*, which had at their disposal 1453 boats of various types and 39,854 nets.[38]

A new social stratum emerged: free fishermen. They fell into two groups. The first consisted of those who sold their fish to whichever factories offered higher prices; the second group were in fact dependent fishermen who were obliged to hand over all their annual catch to the fish factories with proprietary rights over the water in which, at a high price, the fishermen had obtained fishing rights.[39]

The Kalmyks had specialist techniques and implements for fishing. Throughout the Astrakhan province, swing nets (*gelm*), drift nets and seines (*shyugil*) were used. Barriers (*bodog*) woven out of reeds and rushes, which partitioned the narrow parts of backwaters, creeks and river channels, were used, especially when the wind was blowing from the sea and driving fish up these creeks. Fishing rods (*gakhul*) and spoon-baits were commonly used as fishing tackle. Harpoons (*serya*) were used in spring when fish were entering the creeks and backwaters to spawn, and also when the water was flowing back to the sea.

Traditional settlement

A nomadic lifestyle likewise dictated the use of mobile types of dwellings and settlement patterns. The traditional Kalmyk settlement was the *khoton* or *ail* – a group of tents belonging to a group of blood relatives. An average *khoton* consisted of four to ten tents, in rare cases rising to as many as twenty to fifty, which were arranged in a circular fashion. In the centre of such a ring an area was left free of human dwellings and was used at night for keeping animals. As kinship among the Kalmyks was always reckoned patrilineally, often *khoton*s were named after the eldest male in the patriline, the one with the highest status. Usually he was also the one with the most wealth. His tent was placed on the southern side of the *khoton*, considered to be the place of honour. Externally this tent was distinguished within the *khoton* by being larger than the rest and having a white felt cover. While the tent stayed in one place in the interval between migrations, around it was formed a zone of 'domestication', although the degree of 'domestication' weakened in proportion to the distance from the home. The territory surrounding the dwelling up to a radius of approximately 25 metres was made into a space of 'domestication' and 'culture'.[40] Upon this space were arranged the horse tether 5–6 metres to the east of the tent, the enclosure for livestock (*khashan*) 10–12 metres to the northeast or northwest, the washing place (*tatal*) 20 paces to the north and the latrine 30 paces northwards.[41]

The first fixed abodes, in which the Kalmyks began to spend autumn and winter, started to appear in the 1860s and 1870s, whereas they continued to move around during the warmer seasons. In the Khosheut *ulus* alone more than 300 families went over to a sedentary lifestyle. Some of them lived in wooden houses and clay-covered adobe cottages, but most lived in so-called *turlushki*, wattle structures covered with adobe, heated by a stove.[42] Such types of dwellings – the *turlushki* – were known only in the Volga *ulus*es, not on the steppes.

In the 1870s, the Kalmyks living in the Don steppes also began to shift to a semisedentary lifestyle. Winter settlements were set up in the deltas of small rivers near to dried-up tributaries (called *salvru* – 'branchings' – in Kalmyk). In these settlements water for both human and animal use was obtained by cooperative associations consisting of two to three families, using snow in the winter and water from melted snow in the early spring. The site for the winter abode was chosen so as not to be flooded by melted snow or by rainwater. Hence villages with ten to fifteen households were created, but within these kin nevertheless tried to settle together. Often the population of such villages consisted of some three to five kinship groups. In such cases settlement names were taken from nearby rivers, gullies or other conspicuous natural features.

Traditional dwellings

At the beginning of the twentieth century a Mongolian-type felt tent on a wooden frame (*ishkä* or *ger*) remained the traditional type of dwelling. The wooden shell consisted of six to eight lattices (*terme*), between 66 and 146 poles (*unin*), either circular or four-sided and with pointed tips at the top, an upper circle (*kharachi*) and double-leaved doors (*üdn*). Lattices tied together made up the walls of the tent, on which were supported the poles and a circular smokehole. The lattice was always made of rods planed straight, equal in length and round in section. They were set out in a criss-cross pattern and at the cross-over points holes were bored, through which rawhide thongs were passed and fastened with knots. When these knots dried up, they became hard but supple. It was for this reason that the lattice was easily assembled and dismantled, which was convenient both in transporting and in setting up the tent.

The felt cover of the tent consisted of four shoulder-straps (*emchi*), four pieces of felt for the bottom of the tent (*irgebchi*), four square pieces of felt (*turgo*), two upper pieces of felt (*dever*) that covered the upper part of the tent from the *kharachi* down to the tips of the *terme*, a large piece of felt for the door and another large piece with which the circular upper opening was closed. The tent's external appearance reflected its owner's wealth. Tents covered with fine white felt normally belonged to wealthy persons, priests and newly-weds, whereas dirty and smoke-blackened ones were owned by poor people.

The area of ground covered by a tent belonging to older people, families with many members and those who were better off was considerably greater than that of tents belonging to poor families or younger people. The tent itself was not merely a living space for a married couple. It was also the place where all the family possessions were kept, religious rites were held, guests were received and, in winter, newborn calves, lambs and young camels were protected from the cold. On average, a tent with a floor area of 18–22 square metres could accommodate eight to twelve people. On the basis of time-hallowed tradition a strict order had been established in the arrangement of all domestic utensils, both hard and soft items.[43]

All the internal walls of tents belonging to wealthy Kalmyks and priests were covered with a single piece of cloth, the earthen floor was covered with felt or carpets and in winter further insulation was provided by the skins of sheep, goats and Saiga antelopes. At night the tent was illuminated with lamps (*shurum*) filled with tallow, for which fish oil was sometimes substituted in fishing areas. Candles were an index of prosperity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The Kalmyk tents differed from those of Central Asia by certain distinguishing features in their construction. Whereas the poles in a Central Asian tent were slightly curved, the Kalmyk *unin* poles were straight. From this it followed that the upper part of the tent among the Kalmyks had a conical rather than a rounded, convex shape. The tent was an ideal mobile home for a nomad since it was tough, light and easy to set up and dismantle. It was also ideal in conditions of sharp climatic fluctuations: in the hot summer weather its inside remained cool, whereas in the winter the tent protected people from cold winds, frost and precipitation.

One cannot fail to mention the stylistic unity of the yurt's furnishings. Nomadic life was not suited to the accumulation and diversification of material possessions. Each family had a minimal number of items, which in their composition and shape took up as little space as possible, and which had to be appropriate in both use and ease of transportation.

The layout of the tent

The tent was not just a place to live in. Instead, it was in its own way a distinctive model of the universe – the nomad's microcosm. According to the cosmological beliefs of the Mongolian world, the tent was oriented according to the cardinal points, and its central axis passed through the hearth and the wind hole. The inside of the tent was divided into meaningful sectors, according to the following oppositions: right–left, northern–southern, sacred–profane, upper–lower, prestigious–non-prestigious and male–female.[44]

A sacralization of the tent was brought about by means of an array of key points and objects that had to be situated in specified places. All regulations with regard to them had to be stringently observed. The tent thereby became a domesticated space as opposed to the outside world.[45] In a Kalmyk yurt

these key implements or points included the hearth, door, threshold, smoke-hole and the altar with its representations of Buddhist deities (*barun baran*). The tent always had double doors that opened inwards. They were locked for the night with wooden latches, both at the top near the lintel and at the bottom by the threshold.[46] The door always faced south. Accordingly, with regard to the east–west axis, the tent was divided into a southern, profane part, where utensils were kept, and a northern, sacred part facing the doors and containing the altar. If one stood with one's back to the north, to one's right would be the western, male side of the tent and to one's left would be the eastern, female side. On the male side were stored objects to do with animal rearing and hunting, such as saddles, guns, whips and harnesses, and on the female side were kept domestic items: pottery, cupboards, supplies of food, a box for *argal* (dry fuel) and so on.[47]

From time immemorial the hearth was a symbol, and semantically the centre, of the home. The hearth was the reference point with respect to which all the interior of the tent was arranged. After the tent had been moved to a new location, stones for the hearth were placed first, and the walls of the tent itself were set up around them. Besides this, the hearth was a symbol of the family. There were no hearths in tents for guests or for monks. According to the Yasa (laws) of Chinggis Khan, violation of the prohibition on putting out the fire in the hearth was tantamount to murdering a relative.

Another semantically important object was the door, and especially the threshold. The doors separated the cultural, clean and domesticated space of the house from the external, undomesticated and dirty world. In this regard special attention was paid to doors, which were subjected to stringent unwritten rules of etiquette. For instance, on approaching a stranger's home, a guest had to warn its inhabitants of his presence by a slight cough or by making a sound as if he were clearing his throat. Before entering the house, a stranger had to leave his weapons outside, in front of the threshold, as a sign of his good intentions. One was not allowed to talk across the threshold or to pass anything over it. If two or more persons were about to go through the door, it always had to be the younger one who left the tent first. Anyone who had to enter the tent had to cross the threshold first while anyone who had to leave it was required to wait. When people returned from a funeral, before entering the home they washed their hands outdoors, in front of the threshold, and passed by a fire so that the smoke would purify them from the contamination associated with death. If someone inside the home was seriously ill and the family did not want other people to visit, they let down the felt cover over the door. This signified that they did not expect visits from anyone outside the family. When a woman was giving birth to a child, a torch was lit above that same threshold.

The upper opening through which smoke passed was another important element of the tent. It not only allowed smoke to leave the tent but also let in sunlight, so it was a distant relative of the European window. The opening

was covered from above by a thick piece of felt from which, on all four sides, ropes hung down to the ground. They were used for opening and closing the smoke-hole. To close it at night (before going to bed), the ropes were pulled taut and tied.[48]

A specially revered place in the tent was the altar (*barun baran*). On top of a large box (*avdr*), containing family relics and festive clothing, were arranged Buddhist ritual objects such as images of deities, figurines, a prayer drum (*kürde*), an icon-lamp (*zulyn tsogtse*) and utensils for ritual sacrifices (*deejin tsogtse*). The most common figurines were those representing the Buddha (*Burhn Bagshi*), Zunkva, White Tara (*Tsagan Därke*) and Green Tara (*Nogan Därke*). The selection of images was not random. Normally each home contained a representation of the White Sage (*Tsagan Aava*), who was considered to be the protector of all the Kalmyks, and also an image representing the guardian spirit of that particular clan (*säküsün*).

Apart from the tent (*ishkä* or *ger*), Kalmyks sometimes lived in other types of dwellings. The poorest people were at times obliged to camp out in smaller tents (*djolum* and *deglä*), which were more like a hunter's or fisherman's temporary shelter and consisted of the top part of the tent without the frame walls. The *deglä ger*s differed from the *djolum* ones by having no smoke-hole, as the stakes were simply tied together in a bunch at the top.

Permanent dwellings

In the early twentieth century, adobe houses began to be constructed. They resembled ground-level dwellings of the southern Russian type. The traditional organization of space in such adobe houses gradually changed. At the same time, wooden houses began to appear too. However, researchers visiting the Kalmyk steppe in 1909 noted that 'adobe houses were a luxury attained by a better-off class of people, whereas wooden houses were owned only by the rich'. In this context they remarked that 'in general, few families live in these houses throughout the year, for the most part living there only in winter'.[49]

With the change in lifestyle from nomadic to semi-nomadic, and then to a sedentary one, the traditional Kalmyk mobile home was also changing, as it had to accord with the altered style of life. Houses that began to be built in the 1920s and 1930s were made of adobe, mudbrick and reeds. Their roofs were made of clay with rush and were of a gable type. A dwelling house consisted of two rooms: the main living room and a kitchen. The kitchen had an earthen floor and the main room had a wooden one. In the vestibule was a cool anteroom and pantry. Outhouses included a tool shed and shelters for the livestock. There were some houses with two to three rooms, and other cottages consisted of just one room and an unheated vestibule. The walls contained windows and were painted with whitewash on the inside.[50]

Towns

In all of Kalmykia there are only three towns, all of them relatively new. The republic's capital, Elista, celebrated its centenary in 1965. In translation, its name means 'sandy' in Kalmyk, and indeed the town is situated in a sandy gully, near to a fresh-water spring. In the past, the site of Elista used to be summer pastures for the Erketen *ulus*. Then – as the great-grandchildren of the town's founders love to relate in the words of their great-grandparents – one spring day, when the tulips were in bloom, several Russian and Kalmyk families, who had decided to settle along the trade route passing through the Kalmyk steppe, put up the first mud-brick homes in the sandy gully and afterwards erected the first houses. There were fifteen households in the vicinity by the autumn of 1865, the year that became the date of the founding

Figure 5.2 A modern sculpture in the centre of Elista aims to evoke the East using techniques from the West. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

of Elista.[51] During the Stalinist period, when the nation was deported, Elista was also renamed and in those years was called Peschany (Sandy) on maps of the USSR. During the Second World War Elista was occupied by German troops. However, according to the recollections of older residents who had survived the event, the town was destroyed not by the Germans but by Soviet troops during the Soviet army's offensive in December 1942. After the residents of Elista who were of Kalmyk descent had been deported, the town was not rebuilt. Those former residents who returned there thirteen years after the end of the war had to reconstruct the town 'from scratch', because nothing remained there but the ruins of four stone houses. Hence modern Elista now contains just four buildings from the pre-war period, all the rest having been erected during the Khrushchev period; they are typical of standard Soviet architectural policies at that time. One could say that, even though Elista has been Kalmykia's capital since 1930, for a long time it lacked any originality in its architecture. Its centre, as in thousands of other Soviet towns and cities, was Lenin Square; likewise, its main thoroughfare was called Lenin Street. A monument to Lenin, standing in the centre of the square of that name, was as standard as the government buildings located on that same square. Just as standard was the name of the town's largest hotel, the 'Russia'. Their counterparts can be found in a multitude of administrative centres throughout Russia. Only some sculptures created by Kalmyk sculptors have imparted some unique coloration to the capital.

Modern housing

Contemporary Kalmyk housing is typical of the Soviet period. After their repatriation at the end of the 1950s, normally there were three types of dwelling available to the Kalmyks: village houses, urban apartments and adobe houses, which were common in both urban and rural areas. At first, the adobe house was the most common type of dwelling, often taking the form of a single-storey building with one door, a low ceiling and one or two small rooms. Later, people began building stone houses with a porch, two or three rooms and a stove. Often those who owned both a stone house and an adobe one constructed for the latter a cooler area for cooking during the summer. When their son married, he could move to the adobe dwelling. Urban apartments were standard dwellings in blocks of flats of four or five stories, much like those common throughout Russia. The interior of a Kalmyk house is likewise of a standard form. It is rare for any old furniture to have been preserved – perhaps just a box or some religious items in certain families. Nevertheless, visitors to the republic have noticed that, in comparison with other regions, there are far fewer mirrors on the walls of Kalmyk flats, much less furniture and, apart from tables, particularly few items of furniture with horizontal surfaces. The standardization of the interior is largely on account of the deportation, when most possessions were lost. After repatriation to the newly created republic, people were able to

buy furniture for their homes only in state-owned shops where everything was quite standard.

It was only in the 1990s that the first modern buildings were constructed in which the architecture was evocative of the designs of traditional mobile dwellings. In 1998 a chess centre, known as Chess City, was built just outside Elista for the needs of the international chess Olympiad. The completion of this project made Elista noticeably more attractive. It has also been brightened up by a variety of sculptures depicting characters from Kalmyk epic tales or folk stories, a great number of which have been put up on the streets of the capital in recent years.

Elista is not only Kalmykia's administrative and cultural centre but an academic centre too. The Kalmyk State University is quite young, having been founded in 1970 in an upgrading of the Pedagogical Institute. It now has over five thousand students studying twenty-six different subjects. The staff includes about 200 associate professors or those with PhDs, twenty-five professors and others with a proven track record in advanced research, and six members of the Academy of Sciences and associate members of various other academies. The university today consists of nine departments: Mathematics and Physics, Engineering, Biology, Agriculture, Economics and Management, History and Law, Kalmyk Philology and Culture, Linguistics, and Education. Students from several foreign countries, including China, Mongolia, India and Kyrgyzstan, have at times been studying at the university.

The capital of the Kalmyk Republic contains four professional theatres, the oldest of which are the Music and Drama Theatre and the Russian Drama Theatre. Besides these, there is also a Theatre of Miniatures and a Children's Theatre – a particular favourite whose performances, based on folklore or historical topics, have won world recognition.

Kalmykia's second largest town is Lagan, which from 1944 to 1991 was known as Caspiysky. It contains the largest industrial plant in Kalmykia, the Caspian cannery. In the past, it had its own fishing fleet, factory ships and refrigeration plants. Its products of caviar and tinned sturgeon were renowned not only in Russia but also abroad.[52] The third largest town of Kalmykia is Gorodovikovsk, which had previously been called Bashanta but was renamed in 1971 in honour of the Kalmyk hero Oka Gorodovikov.

6 Family and gender stereotypes

> There are no relatives only for that person who himself doesn't want to have them.
>
> (Kalmyk proverb)

The traditional Kalmyk family consists of the nuclear family, situated in a complex social context of inter-relationships among kin – of the kind described by Roland Barthes as a 'spider's web of constraints and rituals'.[1]

Age of marriage

The accepted age of marriage in Kalmyk society was relatively young. For a girl it was fourteen to sixteen years. By that age, the threshold of puberty, the girl's hairstyle was altered. As soon as a girl had her hair plaited in one pony-tail so that the nape of her neck was visible, she became a girl of marriageable age (*gijgtä küükn*). It was possible to begin to look closely at her and send matchmakers.

For a young man the average age of marriage was sixteen to eighteen years. A decisive role in the choice of a bride was played not by the groom but by his father. If a young man did not have a father who was still alive, the one who would try to find him a bride would be not his mother but an older male relative. He could be the mother's brother, or, if she did not have one, then this mission was carried out by the youth's older brother. If there was not even one or the other of these, then it was done by the nearest male relative or even a friend of the father.[2] In the choice of a bride preference was given to girls of a different tribal group (*ulus*) and excluded kin in the father's line.

Normally in olden times among the Kalmyks a wife was considerably younger than her husband. Marriages were practically never encountered in which the wife was older than her spouse. Old maids or bachelors were likewise a great rarity, because it was a duty of the relatives to arrange a young person's lot, and if there were a case of somebody having a physical handicap, such as a hunchback or a squint, then caring relatives found a

Figure 6.1 A modern Kalmyk bride and groom. Photo: Mergen Bembinov.

marriage partner with the same kind of handicap. Agreement to the marriage was not asked of the young people themselves, which is why all adults, with the exception of monks, had their own family.

All decisions relating to the wedding were taken by the parents, and so not infrequently the young couple saw each other for the first time at the matchmaking, but at times even after the wedding they did not have any idea of what they were supposed to do on their first night as a married couple. To correct such kinds of misunderstandings, old women, who had to help the young couple by their advice, were sent into the youngsters' tent. Such an early matrimonial age limit had the consequence that the young couple did not have any problems of compulsory abstinence and among the adults there was no doubt at all about the girl's virginity.

Nevertheless, as in every society, there did take place marriages involving elopement or abduction if the young people's will did not concur with the parents' will. Motives for such kidnapping of the bride were a refusal by the young girl's parents to give their daughter to a suitor, or the love of the young people themselves. However, one basic and weighty reason for an abduction was a striving to escape from the significant material outlays connected with the matchmaking and wedding. These fictitious abductions

of brides, which took place by secret mutual agreement of the young couple, were for the most part characteristic of poor, indigent Kalmyks who did not have the means to provide all of the wedding rituals.[3]

The status of women and men

Characteristic of traditional Kalmyk society was an expression of male dominance in all spheres of social life, and primarily in the economic realm. A nomadic pastoral life was supported in the first instance by male labour; a woman's role was secondary and was reduced to supplementary work. In the socio-political life of Kalmyk society men exercised unchecked dominion. A Kalmyk proverb that has been preserved up to the present day expresses well the difference in the statuses of men and women in traditional society:

> No matter how bad a saddle might be,
> It goes on the back of a race-horse.
> No matter how bad a man might be,
> He is better than a woman.

A woman's life did not extend beyond the limits of the tent and was tied to the birth and upbringing of children, and the maintenance of the household. Among the Kalmyks a good wife was reckoned to be a woman who was submissive, able uncomplainingly to endure all the burdens of life and the psychological obligations from older relatives. About her it was said: 'Even though a woman has long hair, her intellect is short.' This kind of attitude towards women and such an allocation of responsibilities in the household was reckoned to be her fixed fate, established by God himself. It is for this reason that a man considered himself to be the master as an innate characteristic, whereas the woman – by her nature – was obliged submissively to carry the 'woman's portion' that had befallen her as her lot.[4]

At the same time, in everyday practice a Kalmyk woman had sufficient personal freedom: she could independently go to visit others or conduct her affairs without being accompanied by her husband, and in her husband's absence she could manage the affairs of her household and, if it were desired, receive an education. If the husband's absence was prolonged or he became ill, the wives – the eldest in the first instance – could themselves decide household issues. In contrast to the majority of Oriental societies, in social life – on all festival and ceremonial gatherings – the place of a woman was alongside her husband.

Nevertheless, there was every reason to consider that 'all a woman's tribulations began after she was married.'[5] After marriage a Kalmyk woman had no rights to the family's basic property, livestock and household equipment, neither during her husband's lifetime nor (if there were sons) after his death. 'After the death of their father, male children remained as heirs of all moveable and immovable property. The widow did not have a share in her

husband's estate after his death.'[6] By the laws of inheritance a Kalmyk woman could lay claim only to her personal property, in which was included clothing, all kinds of jewellery, her dowry and gifts.

Polygamy among the Kalmyks

In the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries polygamy was not prohibited among the Kalmyk gentry and was regulated by property conditions and economic demands. As attested by historical chronicles, a *noyon* named Tsetsen had thirteen wives.[7] 'Having the opportunity to be polygamists, being allowed both by religion and by customary rights, almost all Kalmyks without exception strictly adhere to monogamy and in their domestic lives, as well as in their attitudes towards their wives, are far from despotic and do not like to interfere in their wives' affairs.'[8] Still today there continue to exist specific terms designating the 'first wife' or 'first husband' (aval'), emphasizing particularly the significance of that first matrimony. Even in conditions of polygamy, however, the position of a wife in an aristocratic family was neither an oppressed nor a forgotten one, as it was portrayed by writers in Soviet times, trying to depict the subordinate lot of a woman in pre-revolutionary Kalmykia. The wives of *noyon*s nomadized separately from one another and from their husband, each with her own tent, and they themselves were in charge of their own encampments.

Divorce

Divorces were not uncommon. Reasons for divorce could include a husband's long illness, his prolonged absence or incompatibility of character. In a number of cases the spouses parted simply without any apparent cause. Divorces could take place on the initiative of women.[9] Simultaneously an opposite opinion to this is encountered in the literature. A researcher in the second half of the nineteenth century testified that 'a husband is allowed to dismiss his wife on the grounds of infertility, for vices or on account of incompatible characters. The wife, on the contrary, could not of her own accord leave her husband.'[10] In this manner a husband could expel his wife from the home on any grounds and send her back to her parents. If a wife provided an excuse for divorce then the husband sent her off to her parents after giving her a horse with a saddle.[11] The husband had the right 'to demand the dissolution of the marriage even in the case of his wife being a bad housekeeper'. It is not without reason that the Kalmyks said:

> A good wife is an ornament for the home,
> A bad wife is an enemy of the home.

Nevertheless we are unable to agree with the author just cited because we find a description of procedures for a divorce that had been initiated by a

woman. For this, so that a married Kalmyk woman could demand a divorce, she had to overcome a multitude of degrading obstacles, which only an exceptional woman would have the resolve to face. In several cases, a wife driven to despair by her husband's daily beatings and insults simply ran away from him. In such cases the woman's departure is viewed as a disgrace for the whole kin group and is sternly condemned by public opinion.

As all ritual practices in traditional Kalmyk society had to be sanctified by Buddhist priests, the divorce procedure also took place with the participation and leading role of the clergy. From the outset the woman was persistently persuaded to return to her husband, not in the least paying attention to the motives that had induced the woman to take up divorce proceedings. After that, as recorded by Dr Dushan in his ethnographic notes, 'fed up with her intractability and obstinacy, the *gelyung*s "festooned" the woman with thongs and branches'. If even these methods did not compel the woman to renounce her intentions, the *gelyung*s behaved in the following manner. 'They stripped the woman stark naked in front of all those present, unplaited her hair and strewed ashes over her head. Her face, breast and abdomen were smeared with soot, and they expulsed her from the tent, sending her outside. After this the woman being divorced was forced to run in that state around the *khurul* three times in the opposite direction to the movement of the sun.'[12] It was a rare woman who could bear such humiliations. However, if the woman still endured this procedure and she was granted a divorce, a prescribed period of time was nevertheless set in which she was unable to marry again, and her parents were obliged to compensate the husband for all his expenses connected with the betrothal and wedding.

After divorce a woman had no right to her own children, who had to be left with the husband. In the case of a voluntary divorce the woman received either all or half of the dowry; if the husband drove away his wife, then all the dowry was returned too, together with her.[13]

The custom of the Levirate still existed in Kalmyk society at the beginning of the twentieth century. A reflection of it is found in a Kalmyk proverb:

> If an older brother dies, his legacy is his wife;
> If a horse dies, its legacy is its hide.

'When an older brother who is dying leaves a young wife', wrote I. Bentkovskiy, 'the younger brother, even if he is already married, can take her for himself.'[14] As also in other societies, a Levirate marriage among the Kalmyks was first of all connected with economic relationships in a society with a patrilineal system of kinship and with male dominance, fixed in customary rights and other laws of the society. A further reason was the requirement to keep children within the same patrilineal clan. The Kalmyk chronicles reveal attitudes towards the Levirate with regard to Yum-Aras, a daughter of the Kalmyk Khan Kho-urlyuk. She has gone down in history as

one of four Oirat beauties of the seventeenth century. 'By Oirat custom, on the death of her husband she was supposed to have been taken in by the nearest older relative: Baibagas-Batur and his brothers should have taken her in marriage. However, they violated an age-old custom: they themselves did not shelter her but passed her off in marriage to someone else, not to a relative of her deceased husband.'[15] This transgression of the rules of the Levirate became one of the reasons for the curse that she pronounced, directed at the violator of tradition.

The kinship system

A common family structure among the Kalmyks of the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries was a small monogamous family that had entered into family-kin groups.[16] A part of the family-kin group that had nomadized together settled as a *khoton*. At the head of the *khoton* were the oldest relatives: a grandfather, father or head of the oldest family. The *khoton*'s senior representative lived in the so-called 'large yurt' – that is, in the father's tent. He was fully master of the *khoton* and everyone related to him with complete respect and absolute submission. Responsibility lay on the *khoton*'s senior representative for the management of all economic activities, and he also decided all contentious issues. All work of an economic nature took place in the 'large yurt', and there also were kept supplies and articles that had been in the ownership of the *khoton*.[17]

The kinship system among the Kalmyks was complex, branching and based on the patrilineal clan (*törl*). All kinship terms in a direct line, ascending and descending from the point of reckoning – that is, the family in question with particular reference to the husband and his offspring – were traced back to the ninth generation both in the male line and in the line of female descendants. It is not coincidental that formerly a folk saying was in existence, according to which 'a Kalmyk had to know nine generations of those who had gone before and of future descendants, and a further nine generations of people who are outside the family' because the latter are people who have not yet come into this particular clan.

Terms applied to relatives in branch lines are highly multiplex owing to ramifications in kin relationships. The Kalmyk kinship system is a bifurcating collateral one, giving rise to a maximal number of terms because the paternal and maternal lines are terminologically differentiated, in addition to there being a seniority principle within a single generation. Bifurcation is associated with the existence of a genealogically harmonious clan on the father's side. Terms applied to relatives in the paternal line are more finely differentiated than those employed for the maternal side. Hence, for example, all children and descendants in a daughter's line, in whatever generation, both known and unknown, were called *zeener* in relation to their mother's parents and her relatives. However, as the clan (*törl*) among the Kalmyks was organized and composed out of members of families of descendants in

the male (sons') line, then of most importance to us are the kinship terms among those descendants of the same and different generations, beginning with sons in a given family: first cousins (the sons of two brothers) and all successive generations are called *üinr* – that is, 'generations' – and each separate generation is given a combined name: *gal-üi*, first cousins; *gulmt-üi*, second cousins; *zel-üi*, third cousins. These three generations, plus the generation of their ancestors who had been brothers, constituted a close family group called an *öörhn törl*. In the opinion of Ts. K. Korsunkiyev, families of brothers, their sons and grandsons in the male line at some time formed a patriarchal family, since first cousins are 'the generation at the fire in the hearth', second cousins are 'the generation at the hearth' and third cousins are 'the generation at the tether'.[18] The latter are great-grandsons of brothers who lived with their own tents but kept their livestock with the above-indicated relatives, and the younger animals of their herds were tied to a common tethering-post, the *zel*. Fourth cousins are called 'the generation at the *ail*' (*ail* is a synonym for *khoton*) and lived in the *ail* of their relatives. It is this generation that is the intermediate link between close and distant relatives. Distant relatives – *hol törl* – are called by the following terms: fifth cousins are *elgn üi*, sixth cousins are *sadn üi*, seventh cousins are *törl üi* and eighth cousins are *törsn üi*.

Descendants in a daughter's line were not members of the clan and hence were not counted as relatives in the proper sense of the word. Therefore the whole aggregate of grandchildren and their descendants, and also nephews and their descendants, were all without further elaboration called *zeener*. These were the children of daughters featured in the folk sayings: 'Descendants of a daughter are a drop of blood which had splashed out, a piece of meat which had been torn off (from the father's clan)' and 'The clan's root is broken off in a daughter's posterity.' For a chart of the system of kinship, see Appendix B at the end of this book.

Avoidance customs

In moving across to her husband's home, the young daughter-in-law (*ber*) was obliged to fulfil the rules of avoidance (*hadmllgn*). She had no right to call by name all those male relatives of her husband who were older in status, or her husband himself in their presence. Not only was she forbidden to address them by name, but neither could she be the first to start a conversation with them, or to go into a yurt if her father-in-law was there alone. On the entrance and exit of older relatives, the daughter-in-law had to stand up and not sit down again until the older ones had done so. She was forbidden to be in the more honoured half of her relatives' tent and on leaving the yurt she had to be with her back to the exit. If she had to walk together with someone who was older in status then the daughter-in-law had to go not alongside but behind him. A Kalmyk woman never ate together with her husband – not to speak of her father-in-law and mother-in-law. With them she could not directly exchange objects, and in particular not eat or drink

out of the same utensil. In large part this was connected with the notion that a woman was a lower being, and unclean. It was for this very reason that a woman was not to touch her husband's head or his hair, or to hang her clothes above her husband's clothing. A woman was not allowed to wash her hair on a day when someone had departed from the home. By Kalmyk custom, a wife had to sleep at the feet of her husband, who woke her up with a kick of his foot.[19]

A prohibition considered to be most strict was that forbidding her from stepping over her father-in-law when he was lying down on top of felt, or stepping over his legs, or even over his weapon. This was taken as symbolically equivalent to an act of sexual contact. Just as a man's energies are drained after sexual intercourse, so stepping over a man's rifle or other weapon was forbidden, because as a result of such an action there was a weakening of the key attributes of the object with which the woman had been in contact. Hence it was thought that a rifle might not shoot at the needed moment or a knife become blunted, and so on. Likewise a young wife was not supposed to let her hair be seen by an outsider, or to walk barefoot, showing the soles of her feet. If a daughter-in-law 'accidentally showed her head or foot to her father-in-law, then without fail she had to serve him some tea or wine while asking for her blunder to be forgiven'.[20] In prohibitions of a similar nature it is possible to perceive traditional precautionary measures directed towards averting conflict and aggression between male relatives on sexual grounds. The fact that such contacts really did take place is evidenced by the clash between Ayuki Khan and his oldest son.[21]

In the writings of a Kalmyk man who was born at the beginning of the twentieth century there is a discussion of the kinds of tension faced by a young wife, especially in the early period after her wedding, who has to bow down in front of older men of the clan – and at times there could be about a hundred of them. All of their personal names were taboo for her, and the woman had no right to utter them: it was a grave sin. A particular complication arose because Kalmyk names often coincided with the names of objects, animals or natural phenomena. In such a case the woman did not have the right to express either the names of the older men of the clan or those things of which the names served as personal names of relatives. By virtue of this, in any *khoton* a special conversational language, one might call it a female dialect, was worked out, which an outsider would not have found easy to decipher.[22] Right up to the present day, elderly women in ordinary speech call their own husbands – and sometimes the host of a home where they are guests – 'our guy', avoiding the pronunciation of his personal name, a habit that could have been kept in its entirety from the time of her youth.

Gender stereotypes

Speaking of traditional male and female behavioural role stereotypes in Kalmyk society, it is helpful to direct our attention to a flexible standard in

the demands on a woman and her behaviour, depending on her status.[23] As shown below, gender stereotypes for people of a 'black bone' (*har jasn*) are so strongly distinguished from those among representatives of a 'white bone' (*tsagan jasn*) that to outside observers it could appear that the issue is about the customs of those who have completely different cultures. Wives of *zaisang*s and *noyon*s, and their mothers and daughters, enjoyed relatively great personal freedom, whereas women of a black bone had to adhere to considerably stricter rules.

Pre-revolutionary authors emphasized the high moral qualities of a Kalmyk woman, her tolerance, love for children, devotion to the family, attachment to her home, independence, powers of endurance, exceptional industriousness and ability to adapt to the most arduous living conditions.[24] Independent of her social position, a Kalmyk woman exerted great influence on her husband and occupied a firm position in the family.[25] A Kalmyk woman enjoyed relative freedom, participating together with men in pastimes and prayer. The wife and daughter themselves served the guests of honour at a meal.[26] By Kalmyk etiquette, an obligation imposed on the men was to help a woman dismount from a horse, even if it involved a noble man and a woman from the commoners' class.

Child-bearing was considered foundational to a woman's destiny in life. For a woman to bear ten or twelve children was a common occurrence in a traditional Kalmyk family, although, as a consequence of high infant mortality, by no means all survived to adulthood. On this topic, I could mention that my grandmother Bayan had seventeen children, of whom two survived, but she herself outlived both of her sons. In her old age a mother of many children enjoyed special privileges. At all festive banquets she occupied one of the most honoured places and received most expensive presents.

Infertility was a serious reproach and calamity for a woman. Lack of children made a woman's status in the family unstable. Infertility in a woman was looked upon not only as her personal misfortune, but also as a disaster to the whole of her family and evidence of its inferiority. In the traditional genre of verses based on the number three it is said:

> Three things there are which are dark:
> Dark is the vault of heaven at night without stars;
> Dark is tea without milk;
> Dark is the soul of a childless woman.

Another 'triplet saying' repeats this:

> In the world three things are gloomy:
> Gloomy is the soul of a novice monk who does not know the law;
> Gloomy is a *khoton* in which there are no sheep;
> Gloomy is the soul of a woman who has no children.[27]

Clan laws obliged a husband in this case to take a second wife for the continuation of the clan. This rule is no longer an obligatory law of family life but even just fifty years ago the husband in a childless couple would most probably take a new wife under pressure from his close relatives. Researchers of the Kalmyk way of life have adduced an exact period of time after which the husband could divorce his wife: 'Divorce was expected of a childless woman once seven years had elapsed.'[28]

The status of men and women altered over time, depending on age, family situation, number of children and grandchildren, and relationships of kinship and affinity. Special esteem, however, was enjoyed by old men with young wives and offspring who were getting on in years. One of the Kalmyk expressions of well-wishing addressed to men says: 'May you have a blanket full of children, and so many grandsons that you won't know them by their faces on meeting them.' On the 'Sarpa' collective farm in Yustinsk district, while conducting fieldwork in the 1980s, I happened to come across the following situation. To a seventy-year-old man had been born a son to whom they gave the name Dalta, which means 'seventy-year-old'. When Dalta grew up and began to visit weddings and funerals, he was always given a place of honour along with the very oldest people as a sign of esteem for their clan's masculine powers of fecundity.[29]

Owing to the laws of exogamy, men were prohibited from taking as a wife a female relative, normally up to and including the ninth generation in the father's line. In this way, a girl always married into a different clan in which she remained for ever partially alien, with everyone remembering that she was married from out of a different clan. The young girl was given a new name, and her hairstyle and dress were altered to the style of dress and haircut of a married woman, in itself formalizing her new status. In this way – and in contrast to a man – a woman had to alter her lifestyle completely and adapt herself to new and unfamiliar surroundings, made up of relatives who were not always well disposed towards her. From generation to generation Kalmyk women had to develop highly adaptable qualities – to know how to accommodate themselves to changes in the social environment, take their place in the group of relatives, defend their own rights, be restrained and patient and conduct themselves so that 'not even a dog would yap at her'.

Other demands on a woman were knowing how to manage the household, as a husband of a lazy wife had the right to divorce her and send her back to her father's home. A basic duty of the wife was the maintenance of the hearth, and in this was implied all work within the yurt: keeping order, preparing food, storing up supplies in advance, sewing and repairing clothes, the making of felt, blankets and other equipment, the provision of fuel throughout the whole year, milking the cows and mares, care of the children and their upbringing, cooking meals, showing hospitality and concern for the maintenance of relationships with relatives. As a researcher of Kalmyk life in the nineteenth century wrote, all concern for the Kalmyks' extremely simple household management was heaped on to the woman. 'Their wives

and daughters milk the cows, mend leather, sew clothing and boots, collect cattle dung for fuel, repair and set in place the yurts, carry water, cook food and take care of concealing the tracks of stolen livestock.'[30]

Another responsibility of a Kalmyk woman was the fulfilling of religious norms of behaviour. As the priests taught, 'a woman must not forget her family hearth and the hearth of the Buddha. Each and every mother has to instil in her children the bliss of paradise and inculcate in them the ten virtues.'[31]

A husband's responsibilities included maintaining the number of livestock and the care of them. As the Kalmyks lived in *khoton*s – unions of close relatives (e.g. a father and his married sons) – the livestock was also pastured jointly, on the clan's territory. In contrast to domestic household duties, livestock herding was not a particularly labour-intensive occupation: two to three people could tend the herds of an entire *khoton*, and the men had significantly more free time than the women. In so far as tending the livestock was a collective occupation, responsibility for it was also corporate. On the whole, as among Mongolians elsewhere, despite the presence of male and female kinds of labour, the boundaries between which were not strict, men and women were mutually substitutable and had fairly equal rights.[32]

A husband did not call his wife by name, and was never interested in her feelings or mood. Right up to the present time in families with a traditional lifestyle the husband tries never to call his wife by name in front of his older relatives, and ostensibly does not notice her even if they all share one dwelling together. It is considered reprehensible to talk with one's pals or acquaintances about one's wife – and especially to praise her. In this regard a folk saying went as follows:

> A good man praises his horse;
> A bad man praises his wife.

It is reiterated in another saying, which says:

> A fool is one who praises himself;
> The worst fool is one who compliments his wife.

Far-reaching changes took place in the Kalmyks' way of life during the years of Soviet power, with sexual roles being significantly altered too. Kalmyks who had recently been nomads went across to a settled way of life. The yurt was changed for an adobe cottage, and later for a wooden or stone house. Along with the changes in the type of dwelling went alterations in the means of organizing domestic space. The traditional division between male and female sides disappeared. Within a short period of time the way of life changed substantially and, simultaneously with this, so did concepts about the fundamental destiny of a man and woman. Young people in the 1930s were the first generation to be socialized in conditions of decisive change in

the traditional lifestyle. The transition to a settled way of life, to a different type of economy, to a new kind of settlement, an 'excommunication' from religious life, more than one change of alphabet and the assimilation of a new model of social relationships, primarily in terms of family relationships, did not provoke an obvious psychological crisis.

The orientation towards maximum adaptability typical of Kalmyk culture meant that, once they had encountered a conflict between the old and the new, people no longer tried as hard as they could to preserve traditions but applied all their energies to mastering the new demands of life. Whereas in traditional society the family, clan and general well-being, as expressed in the increase of livestock, were basic values of life, in Soviet times new orientations were inculcated: work for the good of the country, class priorities and social activism. In these conditions there occurred a shift in the traditional economic and social orientations of men and women. Men, devoid of their traditional occupations such as livestock herding and military service, were obliged to seek a new niche for themselves. Another change was the degree of responsibility that a man owed to his clan.

It appears to me that a change in concepts of gender, which had been initiated by the penetration of the norms of a Soviet style of life, became a reality during the years of deportation. As described previously, Kalmyk women were deported along with children and the elderly. The men were at that time on the front line, from where they were recalled and accommodated in a special camp right up to the end of the war. Women were therefore obliged to take everything upon themselves – both their traditional obligations and those that in normal conditions were carried out by the men. Accordingly, having had such a unique experience of survival, a Kalmyk woman could not revert to the traditional image of a weak being deprived of equal rights. Evidence of Kalmyk women's confident feelings about themselves in society comes from the high percentage of single women who prefer to live by themselves rather than agreeing to having a marriage partner, the high proportion of mothers having children out of wedlock and the high divorce rate. At the same time, despite change in the general gender contract, gender stereotypes have in large part remained as they were previously.

Gender dimensions to the *Jangar* epic

The *Jangariad* represents a type of heroic epic, entirely devoted to the exploits of heroes: Jangar and his retinue. Therefore the place and role of women should not be adequately reflected in it, as women fulfil 'secondary' roles and are located, as it were, in the shadows of the heroic glory. Despite this being a given in the epic context, it is actually a woman who confirms the immutability of moral values and the stability and eternity of the epic world order.

Normally in this epic a man appears as intrinsically active and creative, whereas a woman comes across as essentially conservative, as a keeper of

traditions and of passive-natural power. Female and male in the Kalmyks' epic cycle are represented as complementary, or as conflicting, or as coordinated. Confrontation was present, for example, in the subject of betrothal, associated with the fact that the hero and his bride belong to different clan groups. Clan exogamy – the marriage rule of nomadism – forces the hero to set out on a long journey in search of his intended bride and at times to risk his life for the sake of an unknown woman from a different clan, who could refuse him completely and could even be a perfidious she-devil. After marriage, a Kalmyk woman comes into the clan of her husband, but at the same time never forgetting her own birth family, visiting her own parents; if a divorce occurs, she returns to her native *khoton*. This experience of a double belonging, both to her natal kin and to the family-kin group of her spouse, dictates an ambivalence in the social functions of a woman: she can be both a hero's comrade-in-arms and his antagonist.

Social roles of a woman in the epic are traditional ones: bride, wife, mother. No matter in what role an epic heroine came on to centre stage she always appeared before us as wise, with initiative and independence. Even a fiancée in an epic song behaves bravely and resolutely, carving out her own destiny for herself. Gerenzel, who from the age of four had been promised in marriage to Tsagan, chooses her fiancé for herself: Khongor. She is his guardian and on her initiating their acquaintance she suggests herself as his future wife. Zandan Gerel, behind her father's back, becomes engaged to Tegä Büs and even after his downfall remains faithful to her fiancé and her word, and, not wishing to become the wife even of the handsome and bold, but unloved, Khongor, she prefers death.

Similarly independent in her decisions was the wife of the epic hero. At times she has to go against her husband's will, in order to act in conformity with reason and conscience. Often it is actually on a woman that the hero's life depends, and sometimes also the fate of the nation. Practically all the leading heroes of the epic were saved from death more than once by a woman. The young wife of Khongor also asks to be given as a dowry the last offspring of the livestock, by her fateful request facilitating the transition of her people to a new suzerain: Jangar.

The epic canvas of the *Jangariads* is saturated with elements of various magical concepts. A number of times customs and ideas are encountered in it that go back to a cult of the womb. This primarily has to do with the motif of healing an injured warrior by a pious woman. Three times stepping over the wounded person, it is as if the woman gives birth anew to the hero, bringing him back to life. However, not every woman possesses such a gift, but only one who is sinless even in her thoughts. These kinds of women are distinguished from all the others, whose dark 'yin' represents a threat to a man.

To an even earlier period can be ascribed the ancient custom of taking off the belt of a married woman. This custom was recorded in the middle of the nineteenth century among the Volga Kalmyks by the Russian ethnographer

Ya. Dubrova. The author wrote that Kalmyk women are notable for the strictness of their customs and their 'irreproachable morality'. For all that, alongside this custom are permitted cases of 'hospitable hetaerism', but with the observance of definite conditions. If in the host's absence a guest, unnoticed by the hostess of the home, unfastens her girdle, he has the right to subdue her sexually, and this would not be counted as a sin for her. To the honour of Kalmyk women, wrote Ya. Dubrova, they zealously guard their belt from the hands of strangers. The treatment of such a custom as a real one for the 'creators of Jangar' is commonplace. So, describing how handsome a man is, the Jangar singer is sure to mention that at the sight of the handsome person the women's girdles themselves drop from their thighs, the buttons on the girls' breasts themselves pop off and even feeble old women lament that their chaste years had passed without their meeting such a hero. It is characteristic that several narrators, describing the reaction of married women to the man's good looks, confine themselves to a verification of it: 'they forget about their family and their household'. This means that they forget about everything else, in so far as family and household comprised the whole of life for a Kalmyk woman.

A question arises: what kinds of belts fell from the thighs, if there is no belt on the dress of a married woman? The belt in question was a girdle that passed through a link on the underwear. Right up to the present time in a Kalmyk wedding there occurs a ritual dance by the groom's mother, performed in such undertrousers. (See the section on weddings in Chapter 7.)

Women of the epics are psychologically stronger than men. Often the male heroes are indecisive or doubt themselves, sometimes they are faint-hearted and at times they do not keep their word. Female characters are always self-disciplined, wise and condescending towards men. Often a woman exclaims, 'If a man asks, it's bad – but to refuse him is twice as bad.'

The socialization of children

In traditional Kalmyk society a boy was regarded as the one who carried on the clan and as the bearer of the name of his ancestors. The youngest son was heir to his parents' yurt. The birth of a daughter, however, was also a joyful event. Moreover, their absence in a family evoked sympathy from those around, as girls were considered to be those who, through being given in marriage, establish kin ties between families.[33] Small children from ordinary families up to the age of seven were more often than not left to their own devices, but obedience was still demanded of them. Young children of both sexes were introduced to work, helped in gathering fuel, and in their play they mastered the skills of horse riding and of managing a household. By the age of seven, boys already knew how to keep themselves firmly in the saddle, tie knots, pack things well and pasture the livestock, while girls were made familiar with housework, cooking, clearing away and sewing – and also with handicrafts such as currying leather and fur, the sculpting of

large pieces of felt, spinning and needlework.[34] Children were present at festivals and weddings and observed the adults, assimilating the art of song and dance. Boys learned to perform the *Jangar* – the epic cycle, which formerly had been performed exclusively by men – as well as men's songs and how to play on various musical instruments. Girls were taught women's songs and how to play on the dombra. More attention was given to children in families of the nobility. Immediately after birth the offspring of *noyon*s were entrusted to the cares of a wet-nurse and later put under the tutelage of a personal tutor. Boys were instructed in warriors' affairs and hunting, as well as reading and writing, whereas girls were taught sewing and needlework. From an early age girls and boys were treated differently within the family: girls were addressed gently and tenderly, whereas boys were treated strictly, encouraging in them independence, bravery and resoluteness.

It follows from this that the maintenance of a certain distance in relationships between parents and children should be regarded as a characteristic attribute of Kalmyk culture. To any child, whether boy or girl, the parents did not openly display their feelings, and they kept their emotions to themselves. What in Russian culture are natural methods of expressing parental love – caresses, baby talk or the use of affectionate pet-names – were not typical of Kalmyk families. They tried to help children to love their parents, but at the same time avoided developing in them a close psychological dependence on the parents. Trained in obedience and respect for parents, the children were nevertheless orientated towards independence and early responsibility.

In contemporary Kalmyk society the basic orientations in social life have changed positions, from inter-generational to intra-generational relations. To a significant degree this has defined the character of the modern process of bringing up children, and it could not but tell on the process of forming psychological characteristics in the growing individual. At the beginning of the twenty-first century Kalmyk children can no longer be left to their own devices in early childhood. From an early age they find themselves in a society of those of the same age as themselves: in crèches, kindergartens and, later, schools. If in traditional society a child was orientated to the development of universal skills for securing a living, then socialization in industrial society frequently demands of the child an early and quite narrow professional specialization and he or she cannot pass with ease from one sphere of activities to another.[35]

Contemporary Kalmyk society finds itself on the margins of two worlds, in which different generations are neighbours one to another: the grandparental generation, brought up within the framework of a traditional worldview, the middle generation, whose socialization took place during the thirteen years of deportation, and the modern youth, who by and large have a vague idea about the traditional way of life and value system of their ancestors, and who, under the strong influence of the mass media, are experimenting with Western culture. For an individual growing up in such conditions, from early childhood onwards he or she inevitably runs into the

need to assimilate various value systems, both those accepted in the natal family and those inculcated in pre-school institutions. In this, the more firmly are traditions established within a family the more complications arise in a child in adapting to the wider society outside the family.

There are well known cases when, in a number of urban families, the parents tried to preserve their native language and brought up the child by excluding the Russian language from social intercourse and limiting the child's upbringing to within the confines of the family. As a result, the child met with serious difficulties in relating to his or her peers, and in one way or another gradually turned to the Russian language by the time he or she was between the ages of five and seven years.

It goes without saying that traditions do not always come into conflict with modernity, provoking stressful situations. The restoration of a traditional element in the cultural sphere is possible with a harmonious conjunction of tradition and modernity, and contradictions in different types of upbringing can be smoothed out.

What could be regarded as a successful attempt of this kind was the organization of a system of ethnically sensitive primary school education along with the restoration of inter-generational links, and with children being introduced to their own national culture and art. The issue hinges on the role of a grandmother (*ezhi*) who became a permanent member of staff at one of the municipal schools in Elista. As it is often the case that grandmothers do not speak in Kalmyk with their grandchildren, and a number of children have no grandmothers at all, several functions of such a grandmother were included within the work duties of an experienced teacher. Usually this was a school mistress who had retired and after classes would associate with the children and teach them Kalmyk folk dances, songs, games, folklore and the basics of traditional religion.

Field research

This section makes use of material gathered in the course of ethnological field research on the theme of 'the formation of gender stereotypes among primary school children', under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences and under the leadership of Dr M. L. Butovskaya.[36] The research was conducted in the spring of 1996–7 in Elista and in the village of Iki-Chonos in the republic's Tselin district. Observations and interviews were carried out with groups of six- to seven-year-old schoolchildren.

The purpose of the research was the analysis of basic gender differences in the behaviour of young schoolchildren and their gender stereotypes, in comparison with those of their parents, and an evaluation of the stability of gender stereotypes among the younger and middle generations of the republic's Kalmyk population, in the context of a modern tendency towards change in sexual roles within society. In the course of questioning the parents it was established that the middle generation of Kalmyks grew up in families

expressing a priority role for the father or of relatives on the father's side. The oldest among the fathers questioned (born in 1946) was sincerely convinced that 'a Kalmyk patriarchy also exists now. Honouring the husband's line is a purely Kalmyk style of life.' It can also be noted that this stereotype is sometimes found among young women in an urban setting, so widespread was it formerly. One of my male friends was preparing to marry for the second time and when a conversation arose about his choice, the lady with whom I was discussing this asked, 'Does she honour him?'

Overall, it was found that the parents (of the children who were studied), born in Siberia in conditions of the deportation or after it, were not as traditional in real life. The basic gender contract has given place to a contract of 'equal status', in accordance with which a levelling of the positions and opportunities of men and women, in both the social and private spheres, has come to take the place of a patriarchal hierarchy.[37] In the majority of families surveyed, the wife had equal, or else even greater, rights in comparison with the husband. Again and again in the interviews it was highlighted that, alongside a formal supremacy of the husband, in reality the majority of decisions are taken by the wife. In the words of one of the fathers: 'In my parents' family the word of my father was not subject to discussion, it was unconditional. But in my own family I can make concessions.' For women, the following statements were typical:

> I am more independent than my mother, as regards both my family and my profession.
>
> My father was head of the family, a dictator, but my husband is gentler, and usually concurs, saying, 'Well, all right then, do as you see fit'.
>
> The lifestyle of my parents was an old-fashioned one: my mother was the one who looked after house and home while my father was the bread-winner – that is, Dad was the head but all the burden of responsibility was on my Mum.
>
> Formerly relationships were different: wives obeyed their husbands and husbands didn't help around the home.
>
> Never did Dad kiss Mum when we were around, although we knew that he was tender towards her. For my husband and myself the sensual side of life is more open.
>
> My mother couldn't sit and eat next to my father, and it was only in Siberia that she went to work; here she was a housewife.
>
> Although I can decide all questions by myself, I share the view that the final word rests with the husband.

In this way, alongside generally equal relationships in the modern Kalmyk family, the husband's priority continues to be preserved nominally.

Notwithstanding the fact that 'gender display is roughly identified as synonymous with both masculinity and femininity, the filling of a role, however, is not in accordance with the classical patriarchal allocation of roles'.[38] Roles within the family have altered significantly. The woman has kept her responsibility for the home, having curtailed those things which do not match up to a modern urban style of life, and has broadened her responsibilities, as compared with domestic duties, by employment outside of the home. The 'contract of the working mother', which had become firmly established in the USSR, entailed motherhood as a woman's natural destiny, whereas the man, having relinquished traditional occupations – military service and nomadic pastoralism – and having got a new profession (which normally did not fully supply the family's material needs), has acquired what for him are new duties around the house. Apart from what in recent times has come to be accepted as male work – such as beating the rugs, house construction or responsibilities for the family's transportation – many men do not shun traditional women's jobs either:

> In our family there aren't any demarcations: if I ask him, my husband will do everything – he'll both cook the supper and clear up the flat.
>
> If my wife is busy, I milk the cow, brew tea and take the children to school.
>
> Around the smallholding my husband is in charge: he milks the cow and everything else; I don't get involved. But around the home I'm the one in charge; though at one time he did do the laundry, now he only cooks.

In one of the families, both spouses were convinced that the head of their marriage was the husband. The real state of affairs was different: both of them were out of work, and prior to that the husband had been a worker on a collective farm and the wife a plasterer-decorator, and they lived on seasonal earnings from extra odd jobs. 'We went around fixing houses. I worked while my husband was on picking up: he brought the sand and mixed the mortar.' As noted by one of the mothers, when a woman works, then relationships within the family are less traditional, whereas they are more traditional when she does not go out to work.

There are revealing answers to the question of whether or not it is necessary for a married woman to work. Responses were divided in the following fashion:

> *Women have to work, because*:
>
> It's more interesting to be in a group, constantly interacting with people, than to be stuck inside four walls all day.
>
> Group work – it recharges the batteries of life.

It's boring to stay at home – I'd just get feeble. It's a stimulus to show oneself well, to get new knowledge and to develop oneself.

If you sit at home all day you get tired of daily living and of that way of life.

Staying at home, a person stagnates, and her intellect doesn't develop.

So as not to lose yourself, your own qualifications and professional contacts, in order to realize yourself.

When a woman stays at home, her whole worldview changes, becoming perhaps narrower, and more disagreements arise in the family; it's necessary to combine both work and family.

I had to take six months off work on maternity leave but I barely managed to sit it out; I found it so uncomfortable.

When a woman is in the public eye, she also manages to get more done at home.

Previously I used to think that it was better for my wife to stay at home, as I earned a lot at the collective farm. Now I think that it's better for her to work, as the farm isn't paying out wages but she is a medic and they have to pay her from the budget; sure enough, if your pay is small then it's desirable that the wife also works.

Children shouldn't get used to having everything on a plate; they have to feel that there's work to do at home too.

Nowadays it's such a time that you just can't choose. It would have been nice if you could stay at home or go into some kind of easy work.

Anybody has to work – a woman too, if the work doesn't interfere with her getting the housework done.

It is better for women not to work, because:

She's an innate housewife.

Up to a certain age she needs to stay with the children, for example in the period when they are at primary school; while the children are small, it's necessary to be involved with their upbringing until their character takes shape.

A woman's goal is a cosy home.

Many mothers said that in general terms it is better for a woman to stay at home but she personally could not do so, seeing in this something illogical and contradictory in the traditions. Husbands likewise agreed that it is better for women 'to sit at home', but now, in view of the difficult

economic situation, women have to work, but this is a forced and temporary measure.

Whereas the grandfathers' generation was orientated towards the interests of the family and the clan community, and for the sake of this could sometimes sacrifice their individual positions, the fathers' generation would prefer freedom of individual choice for their children. Both rural and urban parents were tolerant towards the nationality of a proposed son-in-law or daughter-in-law and were certain that 'nationality in a marriage has no significance' as long as they 'lived well' or 'respected us', or else 'so that there would be love' or provided it were 'not an early marriage'. This relates to the choice of future profession: 'as long as it suits the person', or 'let him make up his own mind'. These priorities of personal interest relate to all fundamental questions of life choices for their children.

The formation of gender stereotypes and the working out of sexual roles among children in contemporary Kalmyk society is taking place under the influence of a set of factors – family traditions, school arrangements, peer relations – and is also affected by the mass information media. Attention is given to women's greater adaptability in changing social conditions. Women are able to adjust themselves with greater ease to the demands of the present day, and more quickly than men to orientate themselves to the choice of a new profession or place of work, and to provide their families with the necessary means of existence. (In the interviews several times it was stated that the husband was unable to find work.) This tendency also appeared in the responses of children, when they said – in contrast with the replies of Russian schoolchildren – that women should work on an equal footing with men outside the home and, apart from that, carry out a particular part of the domestic work. It was also exhibited in children's behaviour: in a village school girls often played the role of leaders, ordered their comrades about, took decisions and conducted themselves very actively. A greater stability of women could be determined by two basic factors: a generally higher innate biological and psychological stability in the female sex plus particular cultural features whereby a Kalmyk woman enjoyed relative liberty and independence in traditional society: she could not only carry out women's work but also fill in for her husband in economic spheres in the case of his absence or illness.

One of my informants shared with me her impressions: 'I was in the city of Ufa on a business trip. Going to the departure lounge I felt somewhat uncomfortable, and I couldn't figure out straight away what the matter was: the hall had only men in it, and I was the one and only woman. You know, here in Elista it's half and half, or else even the majority of passengers on a plane are women.'

Family relationships among the Kalmyks have therefore undergone significant changes. The gender contract itself has been reconsidered: the husband has ceased being the single bread-winner, and the woman is a working mother and occupies an equal status with her husband, or else aspires to this.

The data to hand testify that the basic demarcations of gender differences, in the conceptualizations of children and adults in modern Kalmyk society, go along the lines of: high activity, strength, energy, self-assurance and hardness (male stereotypes) and gentleness, weakness, sensitivity, thoughtfulness, powers of endurance and patience (female stereotypes). Ethnological observations show that these attributes can be traced in the actual behaviour of boys and girls aged six to seven years. A significant steadiness in gender stereotypes is observed over time, and also their clear lack of correspondence with actual gender roles in the Kalmyks' social and family life. Real differences in stereotypical behaviour of boys and girls, men and women, are not manifested as strongly as would be assumed from the replies of children and adults. If personal gender characteristics were to appear only as a result of social roles and concrete cultural traditions, then it would follow that one could expect changes in sexual roles and the replacement of a traditional lifestyle would entail significant alterations in personal gender self-appraisal and social gender stereotypes. This, however, is not observed. Research results have demonstrated a significant conservatism in gender stereotypes in modern Kalmyk society.

7 Life cycle rites

> When it becomes known that there's going to be a wedding, even a bald skull will roll along there.
>
> (Kalmyk proverb)

Birth, marriage and death – as the most important stages in a person's life cycle – are always accompanied by a complex of ritual ceremonies expressing accepted folk concepts about a person and his or her place in nature and society.

Within the worldviews of the Oirat-Kalmyks, which have been changing over the centuries, it is possible to delineate elements of different spiritual concepts: animism, shamanism and Buddhism. Hence in the contemporary ritual culture of the Kalmyks there are preserved echoes of ancient cults: the fertility cult, the solar cult, the cult of ancestors and a horse cult; several ritual activities also go back to shamanic practices. At the same time, as Buddhism regulated the whole of a Kalmyk's life, Buddhist dogmas went along with everything of significance in a person's life – and often events of lesser importance too – which were ritually formulated in a corresponding manner.

Several difficulties are connected with the study of Kalmyk life cycle rites at the present time. Fundamental to these is the reduction and fragmentation of contemporary folk notions at a worldview level: there are no related texts about the macro- and micro-cosmos, or higher powers, heaven and hell, Buddhist deities and other personages of Buddhist mythology, or about religious symbolism. This can be explained by a process of ethnic acculturation of the Kalmyks, which in large part was strengthened by communist atheistic ideology and the establishment of a Soviet way of life on the territory of the USSR; it was also a result of the deportation of the Kalmyk people in 1943–56. Much of what had been widespread and considered as natural for the generation born at the beginning of the twentieth century has already been forgotten and has disappeared from among the Kalmyk people: these include trades, handicrafts, games, a significant part of the folklore, the native language and much else. Another reason was esoteric Buddhism, which did not allow the dissemination of religious knowledge

in 'profane' consciousness: the transmission of sacred knowledge was permitted not so much by written or verbal forms of conveying tradition as by the acquisition of ritual experience combined with ritual practice.

In this chapter I examine the worldview sources of ceremonial in the Kalmyks' life cycle and the nature of their occurrence, as well as elucidating the knowledge of, and attitudes towards, these rites among both urban and rural Kalmyks. An initial overview of the composition of traditional household rituals, as at the beginning of the twentieth century, is followed by a discussion of basic tendencies of ritual traditions, beginning in the 1920s, as remembered by the oldest informants at the present time.

Rituals connected with the birth of a child

Birth rituals come first of all in a person's life cycle. Buddhist teachings reckon birth to be one of the basic landmarks in a person's life, alongside death. Birth is the beginning of each eventual rebirth in the circle of *samsara*, and in order to be set free from it and finally reach Nirvana a lama was appointed as a mentor for each newborn child – whose life had just begun and was so far without sin. However, despite the evident assimilation of the ritual into Buddhism, a significant place within it has been retained by magical activities of various kinds, at the base of which lay motifs concerned with protection and with the guaranteeing of fertility.

According to Kalmyk traditional concepts, two spirits accompany each person in his or her life: a *zayachy* from among the white tengri and an *elchy* from among the evil tengri. Apart from this, there existed belief in the evil eye, in the power of a cursing 'black tongue' and in the predestination of a child's fate according to the time and place of birth, or by the choice of name and many other factors.

The child's health was largely dependent on the mother's health and conduct: therefore there existed a special system of prohibitions during pregnancy, sometimes rational but often of a magical nature. Pregnant women were commonly called 'heavy' (*künde*). Usually they preferred to announce their condition as late as possible, when the abdomen had already begun to grow and it was no longer possible to hide the pregnancy. Expectant women were forbidden from visiting many places, such as homes in which mourning was continuing, from preparing in advance the future child's dowry or from stepping over a cord (so that the child would not be strangled by the umbilical cord at birth). Likewise, it was forbidden to eat camel meat, so that she would not, like a camel, carry the foetus for twelve lunar months. Horse meat was also taboo, as was 'stolen' meat: it was thought that if a pregnant woman ate such meat the sex of the child would change to the opposite one. It was also forbidden to eat certain parts of sheep: the shoulder, shin-bones and stomach.[1] There was a categorical ban on cutting hair, which according to Kalmyk ideas was connected with the life force.[2] So that the pregnancy might come safely to full term, at three times – at the very

beginning of the pregnancy, at three months and at six months – members of the clergy were asked to recite prayers of blessing.[3] At the same time the woman's work routine was kept on as before, with no concessions for the mother-to-be.

Childbirth among the Kalmyks, as among many peoples, was reckoned to be an unclean, defiling act. A woman was allowed to give birth only in her own tent: it was impossible to do so at the home of relatives, even close ones. A divorced daughter living with her parents at the very best gave birth under some kind of awning.[4]

With the onset of contractions, a priest was immediately called to the woman in labour for the recital of a new cycle of prayers. After that they began to brew some tea. It was thought that the quicker it brewed the quicker the child would be delivered. At the same time an altar lamp was lit in front of the *burkhan*s and all the bolts were drawn back, the drawers pulled out and earrings taken off, symbolically imitating the opening of a way for the child.[5] A torch was lit above the door of the tent where the childbirth was taking place.

The woman in labour was given a place in front of the altar. Next to the bed was put a chest and the woman gave birth on her knees, leaning with her elbows against the box.[6] If childbirth was difficult, blame was attributed to the woman giving birth, who at some time and in some way had committed an offence before the ancestors. In this case the woman had to pray for absolution of her sins and a sacrifice was made to the *khurul*.

The umbilical cord was cut with a knife specially prepared for this purpose.[7] Three days later the afterbirth and the bedding of the woman who had given birth were buried inside the tent not far from the hearth. The knife, umbilical cord and a silver coin were wrapped up in a white shawl and kept in a trunk.

It is well known that Kalmyk children are born with a 'Mongolian spot' on the sacrum. A folk explanation of this is that God gave the baby a smack and sent him into the world with the word 'Go'.[8] Immediately after the birth of a child in a tent a Buddhist cleric was invited and he performed the ritual of consecrating the cradle (*hursel' arshalh*) and named the infant, selecting a name in accordance with the timing of the birth – by the year, month, day and hour and by the position in the sky of twenty-five constellations. The impartation of a name as a magical blessing ensured the bearer happiness and prosperity. The chosen name was supposed to be shouted three times into the ear of the child so that he or she 'would remember it better'.[9]

The birth of a child was perceived differently depending on the child's sex. A boy's birth was greeted with great joy: he continued the clan and bore the family name. The birth of a girl evoked less delight, although an absence of daughters – who would get married and give birth to more people – also evoked regret, just as did an absence of sons.[10]

As soon as the umbilical cord falls away from the child and the mother's milk has begun to come, she has to take her husband a cup of *arza* (a kind

of double-distilled vodka) in honour of the breast milk, *usn arza*. Breast feeding is continued for two to three years, or even longer. It is not coincidental that one of the most offensive insults to a person was, 'You are greedy: you weren't even satiated by your mother's milk.'[11]

Kalmyks attached great significance to a child's first step: at that time one was supposed to knock the child off his or her feet with the father's hat. After this testing, the infant in future would stand firmly on his or her feet and grow up worthy of the father's name. So that the child would quickly learn to walk, the 'way' would be 'cut' at the legs by symbolically making a movement with a knife between the child's knees, imitating the 'cutting' of imaginary fetters.[12]

The ceremony of a child's first haircut was at one time performed on the child's reaching the age of five, but nowadays it takes place at the age of one year. The right to cut the hair is offered to the *nakhtskh*, the maternal uncle, who is reckoned to be the child's closest relative. A girl has to have her hair in a bob, whereas a boy's original hair is left on his temples and on the top of his head. Those first hairs that are cut off are preserved, wrapped up in a white scarf together with a silver coin and stored in a trunk, as it is thought that the life force is kept in the hair but silver protects it against evil spirits.[13]

The wedding cycle

Marriage is the most significant event in a person's life. The wedding itself was an initiation, after which there was a transition from the status of children to that of adults; therefore on marriage the woman changed her personal name. Only after marriage does a male Kalmyk become a fully fledged member of society and is said to have 'become a man' (*kün bolva*) – that is, to have married. So that the husband and wife are better suited to one another, it is considered that they ought both to have been born in either a 'soft' or a 'hard' year of the twelve-year animal cycle. Right up to the present time a superstition has been preserved that misfortunes (*harsh*) lie in wait for a family if the difference in age between the spouses is either three or six years.[14] Therefore people try to avoid that kind of conjunction of ages.

The traditional Kalmyk wedding was distinguished by an involved complex of ceremonies, composed of the matchmaking, a wedding feast and post-nuptial rituals and activities.

The matchmaking consisted of three visits by relatives of the young man to the girl's parents. Each of their visits was named in accordance with the quantity of vodka they bring: one, two or three vessels called *bortkho*. There could be even more vodka (*är'kä*) than this, in such increasing proportions as to express symbolically the growing responsibility of both sides. The mutual consumption of *är'kä* presupposed a sincere relationship of friendship and in the custom of arranging a betrothal the acceptance of the vodka brought by the matchmakers signified approval of and agreement to the marriage. If the girl's parents did not like the suitor they did not accept the

vodka.[15] In this manner alcohol bore a function of consecrating the business that had been started. At the time of the first visit the parents got to know one another and resolved the question about whether or not to continue with the matchmaking process: 'one *bortkho* vessel' manifested itself in practice as a wedding deal. The second step in the betrothal was an 'inspection' – but of the prospective groom. Its alternative name is also translated as 'displaying the fiancé' (*kürgn üzüllgn*). At this evening celebration, to which the prospective groom went with his friends, he had to show his mettle. The third visit to his fiancée's home is still called the 'cutting of the pillow'. At the time of this visit there was supposed to take place a detailed discussion about the date of the wedding and about the composition of the bridewealth and dowry. All the visits were similar in form and ended up with a meal. Besides the above-mentioned vodka, the matchmakers as a rule brought with them a white tray, silver coins, a rawhide belt – symbols of happiness and unity[16] – and sweets, biscuits and bortsigs, which also had the symbolism of good wishes. At the feast of the 'third *bortkho*' the principal accent was on the cutting of the pillow. The oldest man who had come with the groom-to-be cut out some white cloth that he had brought with him; from it the eldest daughter-in-law began to sew a pillow and the youngest one finished it off.[17] In this ritual the continuity of the generations of the clan was symbolized as fertility magic, since the pillow symbolized the marital bed. It is as if the oldest man of the clan and the daughters-in-law who had taken part in the preparation of this pillow had symbolically passed on the fertility of their clan to the new husband and wife.

The second stage in the wedding complex – the wedding feast – was bilocal. The wedding started off at the home of the bride but continued at the groom's home. The groom came to his fiancée accompanied by his relatives and friends, but the total number of those who had come for the bride had to be an odd number, so that, once they had taken away the bride, an even number would return home. In this evenness can be seen the completion and harmony that is absent from odd numbers. The arrival of the matchmakers was accompanied by strict ceremony, in so far as the cortège without fail had to approach the house 'according to the movement of the sun'. To prevent any possible misunderstanding, in olden times etiquette demanded that, in order to approach the bride's home, and as a form of notification, the groom's escort had to despatch heralds with gifts. They had to request permission to enter, formally asking how best to approach the home. Only men went out to meet the guests. After the required greetings the groom and his friends brought into the home the redemption fee (bridewealth) for the bride. For a long time vodka served in this capacity and was brought in sufficient quantities to serve drinks to all the young girl's relatives. Right up to recent times, until the anti-alcohol campaign of 1985, the grandeur of the wedding celebrations was determined by the amount of vodka brought to the bride. I remember in my childhood the neighbours' talk about a village wedding to which they brought forty-eight crates of

vodka. Apart from vodka the groom also brought with him two rams, special gifts of *umskul*s and separately vodka for the sisters-in-law (*berächudyn är'ki*). One of the rams he brought was alive; it was best of all if this three-year old ram, which definitely had to be white, was also of the Astrakhan breed. The second ram was cooked and jointed.[18]

After inviting the guests into the home, the host invited them to sit down. The oldest people of both clans introduced their relatives, indicating the degree of affinity and the name of the relative. In calling upon someone to offer the traditional toasts (*yoräl*s) as blessings, a strict hierarchy according to clan seniority was observed.

Ritual roles at a Kalmyk wedding are traditional. Of course, there are the groom and bride (*kürgn ber hoir*) – the Kalmyk expression putting the groom first. Often in olden times they were not even known to each other prior to the betrothal. At the bride's home the groom was supposed to show his boldness, skill, wit and ability to sing and dance, or at least one of these talents. He was reckoned as having achieved his task of pleasing his new relatives if he performed a praise song (*söngin dun*) in honour of, and addressed to, her parents. For this the bridegroom took a cup of vodka in his right hand, supporting his right elbow with his left hand; standing up and facing those to whom he directed his song, and offering the cup, he

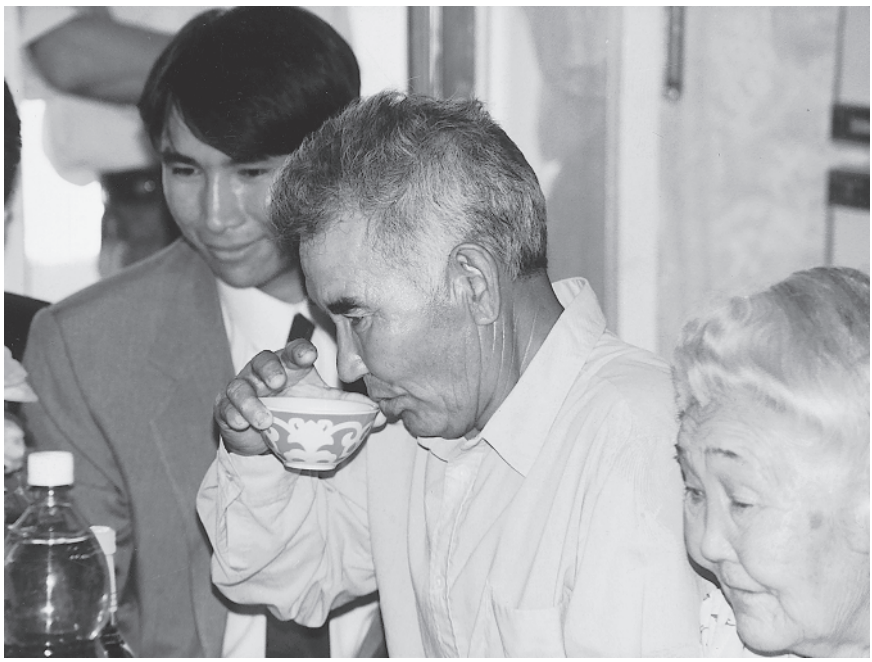

Figure 7.1 Drinking from a traditional round cup during a wedding. Photo: Mergen Bembinov.

sang. Those accepting what was presented had to drink up its contents, put a coin in the utensil and pronounce a blessing on the one who had offered it. The bride had to offer a similar song to her parents.[19] Overall, folk etiquette, formed in the harsh conditions of a nomadic way of life, prescribed to young people restraint in the display of their emotions.

Both sets of relatives called one another '*hudnr*', a term meaning 'father of one's son-in-law or daughter-in-law'. At the head of each of the delegations – the group of relatives of the groom who had been sent for the bride, and the group of the bride's relatives who accompanied her to the groom's home – was the oldest and most esteemed relative, called the elder (*ahlachi*). The one who directed the meal, who called upon each person in turn to give a speech and was in charge of the presentation of food and drinks, was called the *songchi*; nowadays the Georgian term *tamada* is used. A guest whom the *songchi* had given the right to present a *yoräl* (eulogic toast) became a *yorälchi*. After receiving the cup, he announced the eulogy, performed a symbolic sprinkling of the vodka to the four corners of the earth – a feeding of the spirits (*tsatsal*) – and drained the cup. The *tämkächi* saw to it that each smoker was offered a pipe to smoke at the proper time. A special role at the wedding was played by the sisters-in-law (*berächud*). It was especially for them that the groom had brought vodka. Even though they had prepared the meal, they themselves were not present at the feast, with the exception of the eldest daughter-in-law, owing to the particular position of sisters-in-law in the bride's patrimonial household. However, this gift was not as much as an expression of gratitude for their hospitality as an offering to pacify them. Within the overall scenario of the wedding, a scene took place in which the groom and his friends were symbolically beaten up by the young girl's relatives. If one could win over the sisters-in-law in advance, their blows might not be too severe! The marks of an initiation were manifested in a sequence of trials that the groom had to pass: to sing or dance, to drink and not get drunk, to answer riddles or to be able to handle adroitly the bones of animals that had been eaten (that is, by eating them clean and then being able to smash a sheep's shoulder-bone or else to use bones in divination), as well as to endure a symbolic assault and to be on his guard, unable to relax, all the time he was on his bride's territory.

The astrologer (*zurhachi*) played a major role in the wedding rituals. He divined the time of each visit and even the colour of the horse on which they were to take away the bride. Without fail he had to be present at the wedding and he, together with the *gelüng*, was the first to enter the house. In the course of the entire feast the astrologer awaited the hour that was most suitable for carrying off the bride. After all the eulogizing toasts (*yoryal*s) had been expressed, the guests were presented with *umskuls* – cloaks or shawls – or material for making them. The cloaks or shawls, like the vodka, represent part of the bridewealth given in exchange for the bride – a fee to compensate for the loss of her labour from the community into which she was born. The loss of one of its members from her native clan had been to

a large extent involuntary. From this, apparently, came the custom by the women of the bride's clan of an imitation of assault and battery on the groom and his friends at the moment when – after a sign had been given by the *gelüng* – a man whom he had designated took the maiden by her hand and took her out of the tent, while the groom and his friends were redeeming the dowry and carrying it out of the home. The blows, at times not at all in jest, were borne docilely by the young men. A witness of a Kalmyk wedding in the nineteeenth century mentioned that all the bride's relatives and neighbours, after forming what by then was not uncommonly a drunken crowd, used lashes and the long ridge-poles for holding up the roof of a tent to beat up the groom and those who had come with him, trying not to allow them to the bride and not to let them abduct her freely. A real fight broke out, leading to dislocated cheekbones and broken ribs.[20] The bride's pillow, which had to be redeemed separately, was defended especially zealously.[21] (It is not unlikely that this is an 'echo' of a transitional period from matrilocal to patrilocal marriage.) Having come the previous day, and certainly before sunset, the groom's delegation were sure to abduct the bride at dawn. The wedding procession set off home after making a circuit around the home in the direction of the sun's movement. In this continual coordination of ritual activities with the movement of the sun there was again manifested the solar cult that had been practised by the Kalmyks since time immemorial. The bride was sent with the new sun into a new life. It was impossible for her to return to her former virginal life, so the racing horse on which the young maiden departed was set free to roam as it pleased. Until the bride's departure the cuttings of her fingernails and toenails, symbolizing the years she had lived through, had been buried inside her parents' tent. After the young girl had left the home her parents organized a sacrifice 'to propitiate the fire' (*gal täkllgn*), which was to notify the termination of a life, and to offer supplications to the master of the fire, to the sun and to the deity Okon Tengri for a new birth of a daughter.[22] Having departed, the young woman was reckoned as a member of her husband's clan, and the husband's side as containing an even number of people.

The maiden was accompanied to her new home by close relatives but not by her parents. There was also an even number of them. It was thought that the delegation of the bride's relatives should ascertain how she was received in the other group, whether or not they carried out all the rituals and what kind of new name they gave to the new daughter-in-law, so that, on their return, they could relate it to those close to her and reassure them. In front they brought the dowry: a tent, livestock, cloths, utensils, a bed and bedding. On the way they organized horse races. The guests were met at the groom's encampment (*khoton*) and the feasting was continued. Simultaneously in the new tent of the young couple a *zurhachi* performed yet another rite of propitiation of the fire. The carrying out of this rite immediately after her arrival symbolized the continuity of two lives: the finishing of her life as a maiden in her natal home and the commencement of life in a new social group.

A ritual of religious registration of the marriage also took place in the yurt. The young couple sat on a piece of white felt holding in their hands the shin-bone of a ram. After reading out some prayers, the *gelüng* touched the heads of the young people with a religious image. The simplicity of the rite undoubtedly reflects the late development of the ritual, formed by the seventeenth century – the time of the official acceptance of Buddhism by the Kalmyks. It is especially noticeable in the ritual of receiving the bride into her husband's clan, of central significance in the complex of wedding rituals. The young lady sat in front of the threshold of the yurt, her face covered with a veil. The man who had abducted the bride from her parents' home forced the young woman to bow three times before the images of the Buddhist deities (*burkhan*s) and three times to the sun, which is the source of warmth, light and life. There followed her bows to the hearth (a symbol of the family and of domestic well-being), to the spirits (protectors of the ancestors) and after that to the husband's father and mother. In the course of these rituals the men who had accompanied the bride threw down a small piece of fat, after which a young man who had been nearby loudly asked the husband's parents whether or not they wished to accept their daughter-in-law. The fat in this particular case symbolized abundance and wealth. Stepping over the threshold of the new house, the young woman brought a small piece of fat and dung and threw them into the fire of the hearth.[23] The offering of fat and dung is an ancient livestock herders' propitiation of the sun and appeal for its warmth and well-being.

Right up to the present time there is encountered in a Kalmyk wedding the very old custom of a ritual dance by the groom's mother in ritual dress – wide white pantaloons. These pantaloons, specially sewn for the one who is about to become a mother-in-law, are a gift expressing honour from the bride's clan to the groom's clan, and addressed to the women of the clan. Wide and gathered in a pleat, for which multicoloured braided threads are used, symbolizing the colours of the clan, the pantaloons have a piece of sheepskin sewn into the fly. This was supposed to symbolize female fertility in the groom's clan. Having put on such pantaloons on top of a dress, the groom's mother has to dance to the accompaniment of exclamations of a joking type, extolling the fruitful – boy-bearing – woman's womb.

After accepting the new daughter-in-law into their clan, the relatives blessed her, and the party received a new impetus. In the evening, before sunset, a rite of parting the hair was performed. If a marriageable girl had one plait, it was a sign that she was of marriageable age, so after getting married a woman had to wear two plaits. (It was thought that in one of the plaits a woman kept her own life-force, and in the other that of her husband. Therefore the tresses were concealed from the sight of others within special coverings called *shivirlyg*. The eldest daughter-in-law braided the young girl's hair into two plaits and dressed them with a *shivirlyg*.) Now that her hairstyle corresponded to her new status, she had to change her clothes to the dress of a married woman. A maiden's dress – the *biize* – was always worn with a

belt, as a symbol of virginity, whereas a married woman's costume was composed of a wide *terleg* dress and worn on top of it was a sleeveless *tsegleg* dress. In a new dress, and with a new hairstyle, a woman received a new name, after which she boiled some tea and offered it to her new relatives, calling them in the way a daughter-in-law was supposed to address her new relatives.

At night the young couple left to sleep in their new tent but in the parents' home the feast continued. *Yoräl* toasts ('eulogies') offered here were for the young couple and more often were to the daughter-in-law, wishing that she would be healthy, would bear tough children and would be a good housewife.

At the conclusion of the wedding feast *umskul*s were presented. After sunrise the guests were seen off with honour. On returning to the bride's *khoton*, those who had accompanied her performed a purification rite: they washed their hands, held them above a fire, rubbed them with butter and only after this went into the house where the merry-making continued. The carrying out of purification rites, which were normally executed on returning from a funeral, once again emphasizes the notion of the bride's departure from her clan as if it were her symbolic death.

Three days after the wedding, a ritual of 'shaking out the bed' (*kövünä or-der sergänä*) was organized at the home of the newlyweds.

In traditional ritual great significance was attached to the post-nuptial visits. The first such visit was paid by the bride's parents. At this time there was a ritual removal of the curtains behind which was located the bed of the young couple (*köshg sekh*). The meal was accompanied by dances and songs, and *umskul*s were handed to the guests. Once they had seen their daughter in her new family, and the attitude to her of her new relatives (*hadm*), the young girl's parents left. After this visit the newly-wed woman had the right to pay them a visit too. Her visit took place something like a year or so later, so that her parents could be shown her first-born at the same time. The young couple, as usual, took with them traditional gifts. At the meal time *yoräl* blessings were expressed. The next day the young people departed. With this the wedding cycle of rituals was completed.

Funerary rites

The funerary memorial cycle occupied a special place in the ceremonial of the Kalmyks' life-cycle. It was indisputably dominated in traditional Kalmyk society by a Buddhist worldview, since in Buddhist dogma life is regarded as a kind of torment, and death as a possible deliverance from torment. It is precisely for this reason that the greatest significance was imparted to the funerary ritual.

An analysis of funerary ritual gives an opportunity to trace the mutual connection between changes in religious beliefs and the dynamics of burial types. Characteristic of the earlier 'forest' stages of the history of the Oirats were the so-called *arangas* burials, which were widespread among many

ethnic groups of the Sayano-Altai region.[24] In the following stages, in the formative period of a livestock-rearing economy, other types of burials appeared: an open laying out of the corpse on the steppe, or else burial in the ground, in water or under stones. A rite of cremation appeared under the influence of Buddhism and various other types of burial began to correspond to Buddhist dogma in their basic elements. The maximum incidence of burial rites coincided with a period of intensified influence of Tibetan Buddhism. Subsequently, the number of methods of interment gradually decreased. This was related to a reduction in the territory available for nomadizing as well as increased demands for the observance of rules of hygiene *vis-à-vis* the ecological niche in which they sojourned; it was also subject to the influence of contacts with neighbouring ethnic groups and the activities of Christian missionaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, there remained only two types of funerals: interment in the earth (for the majority of the people) and cremation, the latter being only for the *noyon*s, higher ranking clergy and *zadychi* – people to whom were attributed the power to summon rain, lightning or thunder.[25]

I shall briefly describe the rite of cremation and the procedure for preparing a dead body for burial. A Kalmyk who felt that death was drawing near sent for a *gelüng* and bid farewell to his family. After his death, his kin abandoned the yurt but left in it one of the *gelüng*s. They washed the corpse with water, wrapped it up in linen, put the dead person in a lion's posture, read the *Book of the Dead* and recited prayers. On the third day the close relatives said farewell to the body. A cremation was conducted on the fourth day after the person's death, the time of the ceremony being determined by an astrologer. The deceased was dressed in his clothes, and seated on a large piece of felt in the lotus position and without any weapon. Prior to carrying the body to the wagon, they led up a calm horse that was saddled but without a pad and saddle-cloth. At the designated place five holes were dug out – one in the middle and four around it, and firewood was laid in all of them. Into the central hole was placed a large cauldron, in which the deceased was seated. To the accompaniment of burial singing the cremation commenced. Later the ashes were mixed with clay and, in the shape of a *shalir* cone, were sent round to the *khurul*s.[26]

Ordinary people, after all the required preparations had been performed by a *gelüng*, were taken out from the yurt and buried in the ground at a place indicated by an astrologer. Small prayer flags were left in the earth on the four sides of the grave. The dead person was never carried out through the door but taken through an opening formed by dismantling trellises of the yurt. This was done so as to deceive evil spirits that might search for the way back. Only male relatives accompanied the body on its final route. After returning, the mourning procession went through a purification ritual: they washed their hands, passed by a fire and rubbed their hands with butter, lest fertility and well-being be interrupted. Mourning lasted for forty-nine days. There was no special mourning garb, but those lamenting were

not supposed to wear smart clothes. Throughout this time the rules prescribed the daily lighting of an altar lamp in front of the domestic altar; residents of the household gave alms to the poor and tried not to go to any kind of festival. It was most strictly forbidden to give away any items from the home.[27] On the day of the burial and on the forty-ninth day sacrifices to the fire god, *gal tyakllgn*, were performed. After this ritual close relatives and especially the direct heirs were strewn with grains of rice, millet or oats. The floor in the house was likewise strewn with such grains, and these seeds were left there throughout the whole period of mourning.

Memorial rites were performed three times: on the day of the funeral and on the seventh and forty-ninth days afterwards. On no account was the third memorial ever postponed to the third month after death. Prior to the memorials it was a prerequisite to have paid a visit to the cemetery, where at the grave were left *daazhy* offerings – the first portions of *bortsig*s, tea, vodka and sweets. The third memorial, to which all the relatives went, had the greatest meaning. During the period of mourning one was obliged to perform the ritual of *buin keh*, at which a priest read prayers over the heirs. The aim of the rite was to ensure that the soul of the dead person rests in peace and to deliver the successor from adversity. If anyone had to go to the house of the dead relative for the first time after the funeral, an ancient custom instructed this person to take with him a bottle of vodka and some butter and meat. This tradition, practically forgotten in Kalmykia itself, has been practised among the Kalmyk community in the USA right up to the present time.[28]

Despite the significant influence of Buddhism on the funerary ritual, within it archaic elements can also be seen. Primarily these are the ancestral cult and the cult of the dead, as expressed in the custom of feeding the soul and of coaxing or placating it out of fear of *tachal* activities – that is, fear of the displeasure of the dead person's soul. In the ritual of 'cleansing the home' (*gerän tsevrlh*), fertility was connected with protective magic against *tachal* and evil spirits. Religious ideas of fire as a symbol of the sun on earth were characterized by a faith in its purifying properties. Fire as a purifying element was clearly expressed in a ritual conducted on returning from a funeral, and also in the *gal täkllgn* sacrifice, in which the fire of the hearth appeared as a basic value of the kin group and a condition of its well-being; hence one purpose of the ritual was propitiation of the lord of the fire and guardian of the family.[29]

Being afraid of the fact of death, Kalmyks rarely pronounced aloud the word itself and never uttered the statement that someone had died, instead using accepted euphemisms. Depending on the status of the deceased, they used the linguistic formulation 'to go to a better place' if the topic concerned an ordinary person, or 'to become a *burkhan*' if they had in mind the passing away of a *bagsh* (teacher), khan or famous *noyon*.[30]

Shamanic practice was reflected in the privilege of a *zadychy*, one of the categories of shamans (*bö*), being cremated after death. There is a shamanic

origin to the custom of leaving little ribbons and rags on branches near to a grave.

The Soviet era transformed many things, including the external forms of ritual; however, it did not quench or supplant traditional habits in the Kalmyks' behaviour in relation to such events as death. The Kalmyks' basic attitude towards death and its ritual setting has preserved archaic elements within the mortuary ritual, allowing one to suppose that they will keep their stability in the foreseeable future. The volume of information constituting the funerary memorial ritual ceremonies allows one to view it as a kind of semiotic metatext of the worldview systems that had been present among the Oirats and Kalmyks.

As ritual culture has altered, acquiring contemporary traits, what kinds of life cycle rituals are most widespread and best known to residents of countryside and town? We have already pointed out that the birth ritual was less significant than others in the Kalmyks' life cycle. This is confirmed by statistical ethnographic research conducted in 1985.[31] The degree of awareness about birth rites was such that 11 per cent of rural and 5 per cent of urban respondents said they 'knew very well', 23 per cent of rural and 13 per cent of urban people 'had a clear idea' and 27 per cent of rural and the same amount of urban respondents 'knew weakly'. Correspondingly, those with no concept at all accounted for 39 per cent of the rural and 55 per cent of the urban sample. Comparing the indicator 'knowledge of child-bearing rituals' with other ethnic characteristics in accordance with material in the aforementioned investigations, it could be considered that knowledge of traditional rites connected with the birth of a child is a sufficient criterion for establishing the presence of a respondent's knowledge about folk cuisine, dress and other ethnically specific characteristics. From statistical depictions of the preservation of awareness about child-bearing celebrations, it is apparently possible to regard knowledge of traditional celebrations of childbirth among the Kalmyks, in their ritualistic aspect, as a kind of 'maximum ethnicity' of an individual. In other words, if a person is competent in the rituals of maternity, he or she will know well the whole traditional layer of folk culture: folklore, food, national costume etc. In such a way, knowledge of maternity rituals is an indicator of inclusion into ethnic culture.

Although the Kalmyks' traditional wedding ritual had in the past its ethno-territorial variants – Torgut, Derbet, Khosheut and Buzava – a single common model of marriage has quite a distinct outline. It took shape largely in the period of deportation, when the Kalmyks saw in their life cycle rites a symbol of ethnic solidarity. In such extreme conditions the composition of the marriage ceremonial was reduced to its invariant core: there were exceptions in the pre-matrimonial visits, as in the dowry, presents, and even the very wedding itself, which was practically transformed into a friendly evening party. The composition of the guests changed too: now it was not only kin living in one's own *khoton* but also those Kalmyks who were residents of a given settlement, i.e. friends and neighbours. As the Kalmyks were exiled

in a dispersed manner, but a wedding was not supposed to be an 'in-house' affair, often the majority of the guests were Russians and the wedding began to be conducted in the Russian language. After the return to their homeland, weddings were reconstructed, yet many details were not restored.

The cycle of matrimonial rites reveals an essential stability; however, several of its elements have undergone a series of changes. The system of matchmaking, which continued to remain as a prologue to matrimonial activities, was as a rule abbreviated to two visits to the home of the bride-to-be. There is a 'notification' (*zäng orullgn*), at the time when the parents of the prospective bride and groom get to know each other and the bride's father gives his agreement to the marriage. A second visit has now begun to be called the 'large vodka' (*iki ärk*). Its content is condensed into a meal, in the course of which both sides come to an agreement about the day of the wedding, the number of kinsmen who would arrive for the bride and the number of kin who would accompany the bride to the groom's home, as well as the quantity of vodka to be brought for the bride and the amount of dowry. Formerly the wedding dowry was bilocal: at first at the bride's home and then at the home of the groom. In recent years many families have preferred to carry out the wedding feast together, but have preserved wedding ceremonies at the homes of the bride and groom.

A high level of currently practised wedding tradition, plus an attitude towards weddings as a symbol of ethnic culture, have ensured that as a whole there is quite a full awareness of traditional wedding rituals among the Kalmyk population: a deep knowledge was shown by 35 per cent of rural and 27 per cent of urban respondents, and a clear idea by 51 per cent of rural and 46 per cent of urban inhabitants. The proportion of informants knowing about Kalmyk weddings 'in all their details' has declined year by year. However, while losing a deep knowledge of wedding ceremonial, overall awareness among ordinary people tries to retain a sufficiently clear notion of it. Ethnic identity is likewise conducive to the fact that, in conditions when there is an onslaught of global standards and an erosion of the ethnic stratum of culture, in the sphere of everyday life there have been consolidated forms of ritual behaviour that are less worked out in detail but have a fully ethnic coloration.

The extent to which Kalmyks are informed about traditional burial and memorial rituals turns out to be high. Mortuary ritual was most significant in the Kalmyks' life cycle, but did not allow uninitiated laymen to delve deeply into theological questions. Therefore – and also as a result of the Soviet authorities' fight with religion, by which in Kalmykia was implied in the first instance Buddhism – the knowledge of these rites that has been preserved to the present time is reflected primarily in customs from pre-Buddhist traditions, while elements of Buddhist origin have been reduced to a minimum.

8 Food, dress and ornament

> 'Your best dress you wear yourself; the best food you offer to a guest.' In my childhood I not infrequently heard this Kalmyk proverb from my mother.

Dietary pattern

The pattern of the Kalmyks' diet that has taken shape historically, as among the majority of nomads, consists of two basic components: meat from domestic livestock and dairy products.[1] Fish and game birds, which appeared from time to time on the menu of a Kalmyk family, served as supplements to this diet. The Kalmyks bred four kinds of livestock, consisting of sheep, horses, camels and cattle; goats fell out of the basic list with the change of climatic zones after resettlement on the lower Volga, but they are present in a herd in small amounts.

Despite the presence of social hierarchy and of diversity on the level of material prosperity, the menu of the wealthy and of the poor was similar, except that in wealthier households the quantity prepared was greater and meat dishes were cooked more often. There was no food in the Kalmyk cuisine that was affordable only to the more prosperous classes. This is related to a feature of peasant ethnic settlements, in which prestige consists not in the attainment of differences but in the opposite – the attainment of similarities. In the opinion of Ya. Chesnov, this principle is expressed in ordinary life by the concept 'like everyone else' or 'as everyone does it'. Such an orientation to equality underpins a perception of material things in daily life as status symbols of equality.[2]

Materials from a field expedition in the 1920s show that the Kalmyks' diet was extremely monotonous and primarily depended on specializations. Households with watermelon plantations consumed, in season, a large amount of watermelons, cattle herders used milk and fishermen ate fish.[3] If it is considered that in those years the traditional dietary mode was still basically preserved, there are interesting data on the nutritional values of the foodstuffs consumed, as obtained by expedition members. As was to be expected, the nutritional value of the daily food allowance depended on the family's level of prosperity: in a well-to-do family a person consumed each

day 134.9 grams of protein, 100.6 grams of fat and 845.5 grams of carbohydrates, while in poor families the daily consumption of a family member was between 45.8 and 48.2 grams of protein, 38.4 and 89.3grams of fat and 331.0 and 424.7 grams of carbohydrates. A middle-range peasant's daily consumption was 118.7 grams of protein, 122.9 grams of fat and 336.7 grams of carbohydrates. The energy equivalent of the ingested food was worth 4903 calories per person per day in a more affluent family, 2949 calories in middle-range families and between 1882 and 2729 in poor ones.[4]

In traditional Kalmyk culture, food had a colour symbolism, as in the culture of the Kalmyks' close relatives, the Mongols. According to this, all foodstuffs were related to five categories of different colours. White food consisted of milk and most of its products. Butter, especially when melted, was assigned to yellow food. Red food included meat, viscera and blood. Green food consisted of fruit and vegetables. Black food was tea without milk, water and vodka of commercial origin distilled from wheat.

From cow's milk were obtained sourcream, cream, butter and various other dairy products (known in Kalmyk as *chigyan*, *bozo*, *airan*, *shyurmek*, *khermek* and *khursun*). Kumiss was prepared from mare's milk. The colour white is sacred in many cultures and is first and foremost in the palate of the Mongolian peoples: it is the 'mother of colours', from which are derived all the remaining colours. The colour white among Mongolians – and Kalmyks – first of all embodies in itself happiness and well-being, and 'all objects painted with the very best dye, the most natural', bear these qualities in themselves.[5] Therefore milk is present in all situations where its whiteness is indispensable as a sacred symbol, in all rites of the life cycle and all calendrical festivals, such as sacrifices to the guardian spirits of a locality and to the ancestral spirits of a clan, in rituals of the wedding cycle, in the ritual of sprinkling the year's first milking of the mares and so on. It is thought that dairy products retain all their symbolic attributes.

The most significant drink in the Kalmyk cuisine is tea. Kalmyk tea is world-famous for its unusual taste. Basically, it is brewed from tea leaves that have been compacted into bars and boiled in milk with the addition of salt and butter. Both in the past and today the type of tea the Kalmyks use has usually been Georgian; these tea leaves are of second-grade quality, and come with coarse leaves and twiglets. This green pulp is at first pulverized and then pressed into rectangular briquettes. The tea is kept in a special box sewn together out of calf hide, along with a small board on which it is chopped. Only just before being brewed is the tea taken out and chopped up with a knife into tiny fragments.

The place of tea in the Kalmyk culinary system is well conveyed by the Kalmyk proverb 'Tea – even if it's weak – is the basis of a meal'. Kalmyks know many different ways of preparing tea, with the addition of roasted grains, or of roasted animal hides (crackling), cloves or nutmeg. An excellently prepared tea is called by a special term: it is not *tsya* (tea) but *jomba*. Fresh tea is brewed several times a day, and is brewed specially for each

unexpected guest; it is only with tea that a meal is served. Ethno-territorial differences are considered to be reflected in the taste of tea: the Derbets brew tea stronger and the Torguts weaker. Tea has occupied one of the special places in the traditional menu; one can brew it quickly, drink it up and then pasture one's livestock the whole day. In the *Jangar* epic Kalmyk tea is described in the following manner:

> With maple firewood we light a stove,
> A strong tea we brew,
> Camel milk we pour in,
> Butter we put on,
> So that it will be thick,
> So that even the tongue doesn't flex . . .

In the words of Ya. P. Dubrova (a full member of the Society of Archaeology, Ethnography and History at Kazan University, who lived for five years on the Kalmyks steppes), 'all Kalmyks love tea a lot: it has been turned into an organic necessity for them. Without it, they "hanker after" it, and, on being hired, make it an absolute condition that they are given tea to drink – otherwise, as they would say, "I'd get a stomach ache and couldn't work". At home in their tents they are continually drinking tea not only in the daytime but even at night and in unbelievable amounts. A good acquaintance of mine, a rare Kalmyk in his mind and heart, guzzles half a bucket at a time and drinks it twice a day – and such tea lovers are not uncommon on the Kalmyk steppe.'[6]

What for traditional society had been ordinary, usual tea is nowadays called 'Kalmyk tea' because 'Russian' tea with sugar has come into common use too. In the difficult years of the war and deportation, when tea was expensive and purchasing it was not an easy matter, it was sold in portions of a packet – right down to an eighth or a sixteenth. At such times the Kalmyks began to search for substitutes for tea: possibilities included flour cooked until it was a brown colour or fruit tea in briquettes. Those people who did have some tea re-used their old tea leaves. At times grasses called *Agan gui* or *Buzhin avga* were used for brewing tea. People came from all around to gather such grass in low-lying areas, collecting it in sacks. It was then chopped up into small bits and squeezed under a weight, from which the grass derived a brown colour reminiscent of genuine tea.[7]

A special role in Kalmyk culture was played by vodka (*är'kä*), the partaking of which was strictly ritualized in traditional society. Its presence was required at any more or less significant activities, whether it be meeting guests or celebrating a new acquisition, a betrothal or a festival etc. In this regard, usually vodka with just one distillation was drunk, but vodka with a second distillation – *arza* – was a specially esteemed drink to which guests were treated in the rarest cases. Vodka was never drunk on an empty stomach, and was never drunk without an appropriate toast, on to which was

always appended a traditional Kalmyk eulogy – called a *yoräl* – to do with the event in question. Unwritten folk precepts did not disapprove of the behaviour of people who were drunk; instead it was the reverse, whereby it was regarded as especially audacious if a person could drink a lot of alcohol and not get drunk on it. A social event was considered successful if the host was not stingy with the vodka and a lot was drunk in a single day. Therefore a host tried in every way possible to make his guests drunk, and they in turn had to remain standing on their feet whatever happened. Those who had the right to drink as much as they pleased without any kind of social censure were people who had grandchildren. If a person was at a fertile age, he bore responsibility for his reproductive conduct and its consequences; therefore society did not approve of such a person's abuse of alcohol.

Vodka prepared from milk was distilled in various ways: the first distillation of vodka, *är'kä*, had a strength of 17–18 per cent. *Är'kä* has a somewhat sourish taste, is palatable and quickly intoxicates, although the tipsiness also passes quickly.[8] Vodka from a second distillation, *arza*, was the most prestigious, and was offered to the most important guests. Vodka after a third distillation – *khorza* – was regarded as a medicine or as poison and was taken as drops. Kalmyk vodka was produced in the following manner. Strongly fermented milk was infused into a cast iron cauldron, which was covered as tightly as possible with a wooden lid, and all chinks were thoroughly smeared with clay. Into a small upper aperture in the wooden lid was inserted the end of a wooden tube, bent in the middle, and with the opposite end lowered into a jug placed in a tub of cold water. This jug served both as a receptacle for steam and as its refrigerator. That same steam formed on boiling the milk in the cauldron; vodka derived in this manner reached a strength of 20 per cent or more, but it was possible to bring it up to 50 per cent by means of pouring the vodka already obtained back into milk that had not yet been boiled and distilling it anew.

Boiled mutton – *makhan shöltägän*, meat in broth – remains the basic dish of the Kalmyk cuisine. This dish is prepared for various occasions, but there is more meat if it is for a celebratory affair. The dish is cooked in a simple manner: large portions of fresh mutton are boiled in a cauldron, with thin plates of unleavened dough, sliced into diamond shaped pieces. This is served with a sauce, called *tuzluk*: this is a broth with salt, pepper and finely chopped onion. Following the deportation potatoes began to be added to this dish. The most prestigious dish is *dotur*, the boiled and shredded viscera of a ram. The ingredients include liver, heart, kidneys, intestines, stomach, inner fat and blood. All is boiled, finely chopped and served together with shredded onion, pepper and salt in that very broth in which the intestines have been boiled. This dish is very filling and women who chop up the boiled guts do not usually eat it straight away, considering that 'they are sated by the aromas'. In recent years boiled potatoes and noodles have also begun to be added to the *dotur*, which increases the volume of the cooked dish and at the same time alleviates its fattiness.

Dotur and *makhan shöltägän* are essential dishes at all ritual receptions involving food – both at weddings and at funerals. They are served at the beginning to the oldest guests and afterwards to the younger ones. *Dotur* is a dish with a uniform consistency; it is simply served out in traditional round Central Asian teacups (without handles, resembling Chinese ones), whereas certain portions of *makhan shöltägän* are considered to be prestigious. The head is regarded as the most honoured part of a cooked sheep. Preferably the lower jaw-bone should have been separated from the rest of the head and in that condition it was served to the eldest guest. Traditionally this was done in such a manner that the animal's snout was always directed towards the person to whom it was offered. After the head, the next most esteemed part of the sheep was considered to be the shoulder (*daal*), which was also offered to old men or to highly respected male guests. The shin-bone (tibia), the pelvis and the radius were also set apart for older men, the femur for older women, the breast-bone for young women, the kidneys and ears for boys and the heart, cut from top to bottom, for girls.[9] If a male guest were offered a shoulder of lamb, then, if that guest were young he was obliged, after cleaning it of the meat, to break the shoulder-bone in pieces with three blows of his middle finger: with the first strike he had to break the scapula in half and with the second hit to smash its ridge, the part that juts out the most, which Kalmyks call the 'camel's road'; with the third blow he had to knock off the shoulder-bone's tip and after that the edge of its central dish, gripping it in his cupped hand. An older person was asked to use the scapula for telling fortunes. According to the thickness of various parts of the shoulder-blade it was possible to divine the most pressing questions for a herding society: what the coming winter would be like and what sort of natural increase of the animals there would be. So, if the dish of the scapula was thin and translucent then the next winter would be cold and without snow. If around the dish of the shoulder-blade there was a lot of grey matter and the bone was poorly visible then the winter would have abundant snow and be warmer than usual. If the edge of the central dish was thick, then all the ungulates would grow quickly that year.[10]

The Kalmyks knew about different methods of keeping meat from becoming spoilt and storing it for future use. In hot weather meat was dried in the sun after being seasoned beforehand in salty water. During the winter meat was cured by smoking, hanging it up on the upper ring of the tent. For this, slices of meat were mixed with garlic, salt, bay leaves and cloves, and then placed inside a sheep's entrails, the end of which was tied up, and hung from the upper trellis of the tent.

Kyur, which nowadays has become a special meal of the Kalmyks, was in the past a dish usually for warriors and hunters – or, rather, it derives from many peasant dishes that at some time were foods for poor people. At present, however, when urban culture has begun to dominate, these dishes have become luxuries, indicators of a refined cuisine. *Kyur* is prepared in an unusual manner: sliced portions of meat are salted and, together with spices,

are placed in a sheep's stomach, which has been well washed and cleared of membranes, and is tied up. At the same time a hole is dug in some soft earth, a fire is kindled in it, and the meat-filled maw is buried in the cinders that have formed; it is then covered over with soil and above it a fire is lit once more. The whole sheep's carcass is braised in its own juice without being open to the air. Such a meal could be set in place and then one could go off hunting; as the food was ready twelve hours later, it was possible after the hunt to try out the *kyur*.

One of the most popular meals in the national cuisine is a dish of *börig*s. They are like ravioli but in a particular shape. At one time they were cooked from finely chopped meat and wrapped in dough that had only just been rolled out, then boiled in water. Nowadays a filling is prepared from mixed beef and pork with onion. However, with the development of a free market economy, as soon as home-made *börig*s began to be sold in shops this food became less prestigious.

In districts where fishing is practised, to the east of the Kalmyk steppe, various kinds of dishes were prepared from the fish. A widespread dish was fish soup; especially prized was soup made from various species of sturgeon. In the period of mass hauls of fish the Kalmyks stockpiled them for future use: they were salted and sun-dried, and boiled fish was dried out in the sun too. They also ate fish that had been fried. Nowadays in the Volga and Caspian districts the local inhabitants catch sturgeon for its black caviar. In those places the roe can be pickled in any home despite the fact that catching sturgeon is prosecuted by the law. Despite the illegality of such kinds of fishing, the Kalmyks regard this occupation as a traditional one, and the official bans create an atmosphere of special risk, constituting an adventurous atmosphere characteristic of many traditional male occupations among the Kalmyks. In the Caspian and on the Volga the roes for caviar are pickled in various ways, and by its taste and outward appearance it is possible to discern where it had been prepared. At the present time practically all Kalmyks eat fish but up to the Second World War the Derbets did not make use of it as a food. There is a joke about this, how a Torgut sent as a present to a Derbet some Caspian roach along with some black caviar. On receiving this parcel, the recipient threw out its contents and in his reply letter he wrote, 'the fish you sent was all dried up and the caviar went bad on the way: everything was spoiled'. It is thought that only in the years of the deportation did the Kalmyks begin to eat fish and vegetables in proportions usual for the European cuisine.

Interaction with agrarian peoples strengthened the demand for bread and farinaceous foods. According to the testimony of P. S. Pallas in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Kalmyks bought bread and groats from the Russian populace and 'made use of it a little'.[11] However, beginning in the 1830s the Kalmyks began little by little to get involved with agriculture, especially in the Derbet settlements: there both the proportion of cereal produce and the amount of food per capita were higher than elsewhere.[12]

Unleavened pastries (*guir*) made out of flour were baked in hot cinders. Kalmyk women kneaded the dough in salty water or in water with milk, sour cream, butter or animal fats added to it. By the middle of the nineteenth century the pastries were being baked on frying-pans.

Of items made from flour, Kalmyks especially loved *bortsog*s. They were baked from dough that had been mixed out of wheat flour. *Bortsog*s were fried in butter at each festival and their shape depended on whatever the excuse was for the banquet. Flat, circular shaped *bortsog*s were called *tselveg*s: their shape, apparently, was connected with the solar cult. The *bortsog*s prepared for the *Tsagan Sar* festival were similar to figurines of animals and birds. For less ceremonial occasions the *bortsog*s were made in the shape of little nuts or plaited ring-shaped rolls.

A distinctive feature of Kalmyk cooking was its suitability for steppe conditions. As modern society takes on more and more of the standards of urban culture in an industrial age, differences between rural and urban ways of life are being increasingly levelled out. Therefore it is not a simple matter to reproduce the traditional cuisine in modern urban conditions, which often leads to a distortion of techniques and a change in the taste of the food.[13]

To a significant degree the nutritional pattern nowadays differs from the traditional one. The character of the daily diet has been substantially altered by the transition to a sedentary mode of life, the appearance of towns and the deportation. Whereas formerly it had been based on the foundation of animal husbandry and its products, in the course of time the Kalmyks have gone over to the system of nutrition common throughout the USSR, which was orientated not towards a personal economy but to the range of goods available in the shops. Living alongside a Slavic population within Kalmykia, and then, in conditions of the deportation, with Siberian peoples or with Kazakhs or Kyrgyz, diversified the menu of Kalmyk families. Hence the daily menu of a Kalmyk family in the 1970s and 1980s included 'borrowed' foods such as borsch, cabbage soup, porridge, roast meat and pilau. It was in the years of the deportation that potatoes, mushrooms and pickles were actively introduced to the Kalmyks' daily diet; likewise, former steppe dwellers began to eat fish.

A shortage of foodstuffs during the 'years of stagnation' and their appreciation in price in the post-perestroika period (besides an anxiety about nutrition common to all humanity[14]) pushed Kalmyk women into pickling gherkins and cabbages, marinating tomatoes, bottling up stewed fruit or hot tomato sauce and cooking their own jam. Women's domestic skills began to be judged in different ways, according to the amount of conserves they had stored up for the winter. Owing to widely distributed Soviet standards of nutrition in many families, at Soviet festivals the same kinds of foods were served in different locations. Hence, items that during the 'years of stagnation' were sure to be part of what is offered to guests included dishes such as salad Olivier, Napoleon pie, home-made preserves, tomato with pickles and a dish called a 'herring under a fur coat'.[15] In the summer, seasonal salads

were prepared: tomatoes with cucumbers or cabbage. In those same years the Kalmyks learned to drink instant coffee, while cocoa and 'kissel' (a kind of starchy jelly) are even now considered to be 'children's' drinks.

In Soviet times dishes began to be classified as 'starters' or 'main course', although in the traditional nutritional system there were no such distinctions among liquid and solid foods and in everyday practice people ate one dish in the course of a single serving of food.

Under the influence of inter-ethnic contacts, Kalmyk food lost its traditional blandness and began to become much spicier. Whereas at one time they used only nutmeg, cloves and pepper to impart an aroma to Kalmyk tea, nowadays meats have become spicier and are very often cooked with the addition of black pepper and garlic.

In the second half of the 1970s Kalmyks began to make use of other foods, including beetroot, aubergine, marrows, squashes, sweet pepper and other vegetables or seasonings. Parsley and fennel came into use much more rapidly than coriander leaves or celery. Related to this, a joking saying that had appeared among the Kalmyks, apparently in the 1920s, that 'A Kalmyk doesn't eat grass', was modified. Nowadays this saying has become 'A Kalmyk doesn't sow grass, but eats it'. (In such a deliberately rough sentence an inadequate knowledge of the Russian language was meant to express an incomplete entry into Russian culture as part of European culture, protecting the Oriental independence of a Kalmyk who did not want to eat grass like cattle.) Nevertheless, vegetarian food is not perceived as 'real food' in society. It is considered that, whereas women can confine themselves to a vegetarian lunch, it is essential for a man to eat meat every day.

The 1990s brought in their own influence on the Kalmyks' diet. These innovations were connected with the development of commercial structures, thanks to which previously inaccessible products made their appearance in the republic. These were primarily frozen vegetables, sea foods, various kinds of margarines and exotic fruits. It was difficult for people to get used to the idea that drinking water costs money and is sold in shops. An attitude towards ice-cream and fruit as children's food also changed.

Kalmyk dress

The history of dress among the Kalmyks is divided by researchers into three periods:

- the Mongolian period (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries);
- the period of the Kalmyks' arrival in Russia (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries);
- the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[16]

It is difficult to reconstruct the Oirats' attire in the early historical period. One could suggest that the Oirats' costume at that time was practically

indistinguishable from a typical Mongolian one. The basic kind of male and female clothing was a long wrap-over robe fastened to the right side. Cloth was used for summer clothing and for winter a curried (treated) sheepskin with fur on the inside. An important element in clothing was a belt of cloth, quite a few metres long, which was wrapped several times around the waist.

Figure 8.1 Inside a traditional yurt. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

In the opinion of N. L. Zhukovskaya, this was not merely a whim of fashion but 'in conditions of strong steppe winds it gave a possibility of protecting oneself from radiculitis'.[17] A kind of short sleeveless jacket or 'waistcoat' was worn with the robe. The most widespread form of footwear consisted of massive boots made out of thick oxhide with turn-ups, on top of socks. They were similar to contemporary Mongolian *gutul* boots.

By the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries forms of dress had undergone several changes; these have been defined by Russian scholars of this period, namely G. F. Miller, G. Georgi and P. Pallas. First of all, the robe became open from the centre. Types of cloth became more varied, especially among the women, who preferred satin, damask linen and purple cloth.[18]

The formation of Kalmyk dress was finally completed in the nineteenth century. Up to this time it had been exposed to significant Caucasian influence on account of the close contact with Kabardin, Cherkess, Lezgin and Avar peoples, particularly with the common custom of the Kalmyk aristocracy of taking Kabardin women as their wives. Owing to this influence, the attire of both young ladies and men to a large extent began to become more similar to their counterparts in the Caucasus than to their preceding forms. Only women's garments remained virtually unchanged, confirming the essentially conservative nature of the women. In this sense, as among many peoples of the world, 'perfecting oneself is the forte of women, while men are the ones who introduce innovation to society'.[19] The fact that both girls' and men's dress was liable to influence from the North Caucasus does not contradict the above because a maiden's dress relates typologically not to that of a mature woman but to children's clothing, worn by those who had not yet been initiated as fully fledged members of society. By the nineteenth century it was already impossible to say that male and female forms of dress were alike. The apparel of lay people could be of various colours apart from yellow and red, as clothing of those colours remained the prerogative of the clergy.

Male forms of dress

Undergarments consisted of a vest and 'long johns' made out of white coarse calico. Over the underclothes was worn a *büshmüd*. It took the form of an unfastened slimline robe with many gathers at the waist, the sleeves sewn in with puffs and gathers, and in length a little lower than the knees. The sleeve, slightly longer than the arms, was narrower towards the hand. The *büshmüd* was usually sewn out of black, dark blue, claret-coloured or white fabric. A *büshmüd* of black silk was very smart. Despite its great resemblance to coats of the Caucasus region, the Kalmyk coat was distinguished by the disappearance of special pockets on the chest for cartridges (although there did appear chest pockets in which the men carried handkerchiefs), the appearance of a collar-support, which was absent from its Caucasian counterparts, and the narrowing of the sleeves, as the Caucasus variant was

the opposite, very wide. Under the *büshmüd* was worn a 'dicky' (a false shirt-front), sewn together with silver and gold thread, which concealed the gap on the chest. The *büshmüd* was always worn with a belt, without which one could not appear in public.

On top of the *büshmüd* a cape (*armyak*) of camel-hair cloth (*ermek*) or a sheepskin coat was worn at cold times of the year. Shoes were changed for soft leather boots; they were worn with canvas foot bindings in the summer and with woollen socks in the winter.

The customary winter garment for Kalmyks of all ethno-territorial groups (*ulus*es) was a sheepskin overcoat embroidered at the waist with a stand-up collar made of lamb's wool. In its cut such an overcoat repeated that of the *büshmüd*. The hems and shirt cuffs were trimmed with borders of colourful cloth and, usually, of lamb's wool, but among wealthy people of otter, beaver, sable or marten fur.[20] Highly prized was a colt-hair overcoat (*doha*), of a loose-fitting cut, sewn from the skins of horses that had been knocked down or had died, with the hair on the outside. The collar was made of black lamb's wool. Such an overcoat was worthy only of those who owned a large herd.

In severe frost, when setting out on a long journey, well-to-do Kalmyks wore unbuttoned sheepskin coats of a type that the Kalmyks had seen among their Russian neighbours. They wore sheepskin trousers sewn with the wool on the inside, and felt stockings.

The Kalmyk nobility wore expensive formal overcoats (*iyuchi*), which were sewn from white or black lamb's wool, and also the fur of sable, beaver, ermine, ferret or squirrel. They were covered with an expensive dark material. The flaps and the edges of the sleeves were trimmed with astrakhan wool or, less commonly, with sable or beaver fur. Such overcoats cost an entire fortune and were the pride of their owners.[21]

Female dress

Women's costume also included underwear. It had the appearance of a long, unfastened shirt and long johns made from white coarse calico. Over it were worn *terlig*s, which at one time among the Oirats had been a long (down to the heels) unfastened robe, but over time turned into a closed dress with an upright collar, sewn in puff sleeves and long cuffs tapering towards the hand. The dress was buttoned up with hooks and loops, while buttons played a decorative role. Over the dress was worn a sleeveless garment called a *tsegdeg*, which was as long as the dress, but unfastened. The dress was decorated with rich embroidery. Especially interesting in the cut of the dress was the shape of the sleeve, which harked back to the haunch of cattle, and the cuff imitated the shape of a hoof, but at the same time the wide puff was reminiscent of the wing of a swan. These zoomorphic motifs in women's costume go back to myths of ethnogenesis, according to which both the swan and the bull were totems of early Kalmyk clans.

At the same time, the belt as an item of clothing was essential only for a maiden's costume, and was absent from a mature woman's dress. A married woman wore loose-fitting, multilayered clothes, which hid the waist even of those who had one. In such a manner, by Kalmyk tradition, as in any culture, a difference between the bodies of a maiden and of a married woman was demarcated. Tight clothing enclosed a girl's immature body, whereas looser clothes were for the ripened body of a mature woman.[22]

A young woman's costume was made out of a dress called *biize*, sewn together at the waist, and a skirt gathered at the waist with pleats. Over the breast was a false shirt-front embroidered with ornamentation, and executed with gold and silver threads. The maiden's dress was always worn with a belt. In its cut the *biize* was close to that of similar dress among peoples of the Caucasus. An essential element in an unmarried girl's dress was a tight underbodice made out of canvas, and iron worn under the dress, the function of which was to hinder the natural growth of the breasts.

Traditional notions of beauty and propriety demanded that young women be flat-chested, as breast development was implicitly taken as a sign of a certain sexuality. We can cite the tale of a Kalmyk woman, which was recorded in the USA:

> When we were living in Bulgaria I had a girl schoolfriend whose mother had died and she had nobody to stitch together a camisole because it was impossible to buy one. We were thirteen or fourteen years old and this girl was very embarrassed that her breast was growing freely and she always went around in a sweater, even in the summer: she threw the sweater over her back and knotted the sleeves over her breast, so that the bulging shape should not be visible. We didn't guess straight away why in the heat she went around in a sweater, but when we understood my Mum sewed her a camisole, and after that she no more wore a sweater in the summer.[23]

A fight against wearing a camisole in the years of Soviet power was manifested in a struggle against discrimination against women in society, similar to the analogous fight in Central Asia against wearing the yashmak or veil. In April 1921 a special decree was adopted by the Central Executive Committee forbidding the wearing of a camisole.[24]

A sheepskin coat served as warm winter clothing for unmarried girls, its cut in no way distinguishable from that of married women, and in rich families it was a light overcoat with a fur lining.

An indispensable part of the costume was the head-dress. They were of different shapes, reflecting age and sex, social class and ethno-territorial features. The headgear, as was the case for all clothing, had social significance and expressed well defined principles of age and sex, at the same time also being subdivided into head coverings for everyday wear and those for festivals. The most common form designated for everyday use was a low

oblong hat, vaguely reminiscent of a 'forage cap', which went by the name of a 'kamchatka' (referring to its being made of damask linen). Usually it was worn by marriageable girls and by young ladies who had recently married, and who did not yet have children. This kamchatka hat was black or dark red, with designs embroidered on to it with silver threads, the patterns reminiscent of flowers or of the leaves of various types of plants. Sewn on to the top was a red plume, which was augmented with the red tassel sign of the *ulan zala*. The hat was often decorated with beadwork.

Married women likewise wore hats of a round shape, sewn together out of the same material and with the same kind of patterns, which were called *jatag*. Other types of round women's hats, called *toortsog*s, were ornamented with embroidery and beads. Similar hats, sewn together out of astrakhan, the edge of which was trimmed with mink, were sewn for men. In the centre the red tassel was reinforced.

The *halmag* festival hat for women was elegant and interesting. They were worn on festive occasions, and at weddings, and so they were more colourfully finished off. On the left side was sewn an ornament called the 'colt's hoof', on the right side was a foliate pattern and on top was a red tassel made out of silk threads.

Middle-aged or older women wore hats that went by the name of *byuslyachi* and *khajilga*. Usually they were made of astrakhan. *Khajilga* hats had circular brims but their tops were rectangular, with the anterior part upraised. The crown of the hat was covered with a black cloth. *Byuslyachi* hats were sewn in a similar manner, but their brims were convex and thick around the perimeter. Between the upper and lower parts brocade lace was sewn on, with the ends sewn together at the back. Women of noble birth wore *byuslyachi* with borders framed with sobol or mink fur and with the upper part covered with Chinese brocade and with a large red silken tassel.

Kalmyks of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries apparently wore footwear with a high upper part on thick soles, and with a pointed toe turned upwards. There was no particular difference in the footwear of either sex. In the nineteenth century men and women wore boots sewn together from a single piece, folded double, and with the seam at the rear, the top of the boot reaching to the knees. For men the boots were preferably made out of Morocco leather of a black colour, but red for women. When in the summer it was time to work in the meadows, shoes were worn that were sewn from an entire piece of black Russia leather. In the winter many people, especially children and men, used felt boots that had been bought. All kinds of footwear were worn over felt stockings or puttees made of canvas or cloth.[25]

At the beginning of the twentieth century Kalmyks began more often to wear clothing of an urban type, but this relates only to footwear and headwear; among the latter, peak caps were especially popular. Dresses of a factory origin were brought in as womens' clothing. At the time when there was an assault on the culture, the youth began to wear clothing of a military type: a soldier's shirt, belt and sword-belt. At the end of the 1930s and

Figure 8.2 Lenin Square, a centre for the cultural and political life of residents of Elista. Photo: Sophie Loubaton.

beginning of the 1940s young people in both the town and the country had gone over completely to clothing of a European type.[26] When at the beginning of the 1970s women's trousers began to be worn by fashionable people in Elista, the older generation of Kalmyks frowned on such dress. Apparently this was connected with the fact that, even though Kalmyk women had also worn trousers in olden times, they belonged to the undergarments and it was unthinkable to wear them without outer garments; for old people in the 1970s these seemed to be indecent. In the course of time, however, they had to be reconciled both to the short skirts of young women and to other innovations of modern fashion.

Decoration

A special place in the Kalmyks' dress was occupied by fine gold and silver jewellery, which fulfilled a variety of functions. Primarily it was a symbol of nobility and wealth. The higher a person was in the social hierarchy, the greater the quantity of expensive ornamentation he or she had to own and demonstrate. Festive dress for many aristocratic men, women and children was supplemented by belts, earrings, *tokug* pendants at the end of a woman's hair braids and rings manufactured out of gold and silver, ornamented with precious and semi-precious stones. Many articles, of both sacred and everyday use, were decorated, and special attention was devoted to the ornamentation of a horse's harness. The Kalmyk aristocracy was familiar with the most expensive and rare stones; they highly valued gemstones and had a good sense of their quality.

The wearing of expensive ornaments by the aristocracy was politically motivated. Jewels not only graphically demonstrated a clan's strength and power, its wealth and prosperity in the present, but also confirmed the nobility and antiquity of the clan, and hence its right to authority.

An interesting legend has been preserved about how a Chinese emperor of the Ming dynasty, Yun-Li, in 1410 conferred a jade signet ring with his personal initials on the Oirat khan Mergeni Erketu. This ring was passed on as an heirloom among the Kalmyk khans, the last of whom, Ubushi khan in 1772, entrusted it to the Manchu emperor in the town of Dzhekhay.[27]

By the first quarter of the eighteenth century, when the external policy of the Kalmyk khanate was practically independent, the Kalmyk khans fitted out caravans to Tibet, China and Mongolia, whence were imported essential cult objects as well as luxury items – expensive fabrics, silks and ornaments. Therefore women of the nobility had the opportunity to wear ornaments of jasper, turquoise, jade and rock crystal, which were more characteristic of Central Asia, Siberia and the Far East.

Dynastic marriages by the Kalmyk khans with princes from the Caucasus and Turkmenistan introduced into general circulation new ornamentation and different jewellery techniques. As often as not, in the nineteenth century noble people of Kalmykia ordered weaponry and sets of jewellery for women from master craftsmen of the Caucasus region.

Stretching into antiquity, the primary function of wares made out of silver, gold and precious stones was magical: they were supposed to protect people from evil spirits, the evil eye and other adversities of life. It was thought that silver had great power against unclean spirits, who are incapable of lifting even the lightest silver coin. There existed unwritten – but passed on by word of mouth over many generations – meanings and rules for the wearing of ornaments. These, and many other customs useful in the lives of the Kalmyks, were accompanied by terrifying myths. Hence it was thought that women and men were obliged to wear rings and earrings as otherwise, instead of these ornaments, snakes would be hung on their ears

and fingers in the kingdom of Erlik Nomin-khan, ruler of the underworld. Married women wore earrings in both ears, unmarried ladies only on the right and men only on the left. In this appears thinking in the form of binary oppositions, which are traditional in the Mongolian world, according to which a woman's soul is located in the right half of the body whereas a man's soul is on his left. Therefore a man wore on his left everything of silver: an earring, a ring on his finger and a knife.

Young girls wore small earrings, most often made of silver, and sometimes of 'pure gold'; little earrings with a small red eye were especially popular. On their fingers they wore silver rings of an ordinary form, at times even aluminium ones. All this, in folk opinion, protected the child from the evil eye and evil spirits.

Married women wore large pendant earrings. Particularly common were little earrings with five red stones. This number corresponded to the five senses. An opinion was current that one was supposed to wear gold in the ears, as it helped the mind to work, silver on the neck as a protection for the soul and copper on the arms for the preservation of health. According to another rule, a person who by chance had found some small valuable has to give it straight away as a donation to the temple, as otherwise misfortune awaited him.

Special significance was attributed to earrings. For a person to become poor was tolerable, but the earring should not be given up. Hence an old saying condemns the behaviour of a drunkard who 'gets drunk to such an extent that he can lose his earring'. Earrings with pendants were especially prized. There existed another unwritten rule, according to which, if an earring is lost, one should not throw away the second one or melt it down to make something else. This taboo was probably connected with the concept of parity and of the evenness of numbers as completion and wholeness. Violation of this symmetry provoked disharmony and disturbs the order of things.

Silver, gold and platinum were most popular among the Kalmyks. Many precious stones were well known to them: coral, turquoise, pearls, amber, jade, chalcedony, sapphire, jasper, ruby and, of course, diamond. These gems were used in decorations both for everyday use and for formal attire. From them were fashioned buttons, earrings, bracelets, signet rings, other types of rings and *tokug*s (which are described below).

It was very common for a woman to wear jewellery and she kept it with her practically all her life. All little girls had their ears pierced; sometimes this was done as soon as the child began to hold up her own head. For this procedure, a ring was made out of lead, then cut with scissors; then the child's ear lobes were gently pinched with the two ends of the lead ring. The lead was drawn together again and fused into a ring without any infection from the piercing procedure. After that, once its purpose had been achieved, the lead was broken and a small stick of tea was stuck into the little hole so that the welt should not become infected. Later a strand of silk was threaded through it and, later still, some small children's earrings.

There are testimonies that, in families where one child after another had died, a child's nose was pierced. Apparently such a kind of inversion was justified to mislead evil spirits, just as happened in other types of inversions, such as making use of a Russian (rather than Kalmyk) midwife, giving a name from a foreign language or dressing children in clothes characteristic of the opposite sex.

A maiden's belt was a symbol of its owner's purity and chastity, an embodiment of the girl's virginity. At major festivals attention was always paid to the belt. The girdles were of various kinds – for everyday use and ceremonial occasions. In less wealthy families the belts were narrow, of leather, with a silver buckle and with silver coins hanging from the belt. Among more prosperous people the girls' belts were entirely of silver, without a leather foundation: silver links were joined together flexibly one to another, and the belt was light and simple.

Unmarried girls wore rings, but only on the little finger of both hands. A marriageable girl wore somewhat more expensive jewellery. When a girl got married, she dressed herself in jewellery that had been inherited as an heirloom. The *ezhin mirde* – the mother's talisman, with a prayer, worn on the neck – could only be passed on to a daughter; if there were none in a family, then it could go to a granddaughter. If a young man liked a girl, then, if he were in a position to do so, he bought for his future wife a full set of silver jewellery: women's pendant earrings, decorated with black enamel, and burnished *tokug*s of the same design.

A married woman wore rings on all fingers of her left hand, often ornamenting her hands with several rings straight away. A girdle was absent from a married woman's dress, but here we find another type of ornamentation: buttons. They were not functional but decorative. Buttons were arranged on the chest on each side of the opening, in pairs, and in this case there were three pairs of them. Sometimes they were sewn in a row, when there were not six, but five. Such buttons were made of silver or gold and were decorated with engraving, carving, filigree or gemstones. Finely crafted quality buttons frequently constituted works of art.

Even if earrings, rings on the fingers and bracelets are encountered in the material culture of many peoples of the world, *tokug*s were characteristic only of Oirat women.[28] *Tokug*s are pendants of metal, usually silver, manufactured in a shape remotely reminiscent of an arrow-head. Their origin is likely to be connected with the superstition that a person's life-force is kept in the hair: to burn the hair is equivalent to cremating oneself.

Married women had two pig-tails, in the right one of which she ostensibly kept her own life-force, and in the left the life-force of her husband. Therefore a married woman kept her hair away from an outsider's view and could never appear bare-headed in front of a stranger. For this purpose the tresses were arranged with special covers called *sheverlyk*s, sewn together out of velvet, velveteen or silk, normally of a dark colour, which ended in *tokug*s. For a Kalmyk woman, housework never came to an end – but, tucked away

in *sheverlyk*s and weighed down with *tokug*s, her plaits did not get in the way of domestic tasks.[29]

However, *tokug*s traditionally had a magical meaning too. A number of times in the *Jangar* epic cycle we come across the topic of miraculous healing of a wounded hero by a woman who three times stepped across the warrior's body, while pronouncing an incantation and at the same time striking the wounded person with a *tokug*. The possibility that this very word *tokug* signifies 'an arrow for hitting' cannot be ruled out.[30]

Moreover, this consideration of *tokug* arrows is further comprehensible if it is remembered that among the Kalmyks magical powers are ascribed to all objects that are regarded as *buudal*s – literally, 'those which have been sent down'. If arrows, probably left behind in former times by warriors or hunters, were located in a place where lightning had struck, they were regarded as the arrows of dragons and were used in olden times as a means for healing the sick.[31]

Kalmyks at the present time also love ornamentation. Men wear rings and signet rings; sometimes young men wear an earring in one ear. In the past decade it has become fashionable for both men and women to wear pendants with Buddhist symbols on them.

Women love jewellery to a high degree. Earrings, rings and signet rings, pendants, chains and bracelets of silver and gold can be seen on any young lady or mature woman, as jewellery became much more common in the period after perestroika, when it became more accessible to people.

9 Folk handicrafts and decorative-applied arts

> Speaking about her little daughter, a friend of mine named Darima informs me, 'She has held a needle since she was three years old'. What this means is that the girl began to sew by hand at that age.

The Kalmyks' folk handicrafts were often connected with a domestic mode of production. A consequence of the subsistence economy that for a long time had been practised among the Oirats, and later among the Kalmyks, was that each family had a knowledge of, and involvement in, domestic handicrafts – out of which businesses later grew up.

Felt manufacture

One of the most important branches of household production was the treatment of wool and the manufacture of various wares out of it. It was quite a labour-intensive process. The shorn wool was sorted by shade, as Kalmyk sheep were of different colours: white, ginger, black and grey. After sorting, the wool was washed in water from a running stream or in a large trough of water. The next stage of processing the wool is combing and carding. At times this would occupy Kalmyk women all the summer and autumn. Usually this took place out in the open air. After gathering together, once they had finished gossiping, they fluffed up the wool by hand, picking various tiny particles of rubbish out of the sheep's wool. The combed and carded wool (*moshksn noosn*) was tied up into bundles, the length of which could be as long as two metres. After such meticulous treatment it became soft and firm, a fine raw material for the preparation of woollen products.[1]

Sheep shearing started at the end of May. The sheep were shorn with large scissors. Afterwards, when the wool had dried out a little, its processing began. The work was carried out within the yurt so that the wind would not scatter the wool. At first the site was prepared: starting from the tent's centre, where the hearth was located, the trivet was picked up and its place covered with a thick layer of earth. An old felt was spread on the ground and on top of it were spread dry cow hides with the hair on the underside.

All of this was called the underlay. Then two or three armfuls of fleece were placed on to the underlay. Some eight to ten people, both men and women, seated themselves around it and, taking in one hand a pair of flexible sticks, approximately half a metre in length, began to flail at the wool. They carried on beating until they had threshed out all the dust and dirt, until the hairs and wool had been transformed to the likeness of fluff. The wool that had been treated in such a manner was furled up into a roll and put away. Once all the wool had been processed, the rolling out of the felt commenced.[2]

Felt rolling was labour-intensive too, demanding a special skill in work. At the beginning an old felt of about three to four metres in width and the same in length was spread out in a level place. Several elderly women sat in a row on this underlay. Then the clean, beaten out wool was brought to them. The women, starting from the edge of the underlay, spread out this wool in an even layer, squeezing it down with their hands. When the wool had been distributed to an appropriate level throughout all the underlay, it was evenly sprinkled with warm water. Then several people furled up the damp wool into a roll, wound around its entire length ropes made of camel hair and tied it up in several places with strong knots. The roll was placed on to a long trellis. On one side of it ten to fifteen people took their places. In one hand they took the ropes by the knots and simultaneously slightly raised and threw back on to the trellis this thick roll of rolled up wool; this movement was repeated over a thousand times. After being lifted and dropped down again, more than a thousand times, the roll was set free from the ropes and any felt that was still thin and uncompacted was pulled out. The felt was then turned over on to another blanket, once more sprinked with warm water and then rolled. It was then laid on to a wooden block where everyone at the same time pressed down on it as hard as they could with their elbows and forearms. From this the felt was all the more compressed, attaining its requisite springiness.[3]

If an outsider happened to turn up at the time when the felt was being manufactured, one of the young women would stand up, take a tuft of wool, roll it into a tobacco leaf and offer it to the guest. The latter, clasping the wool to himself, pronounced a blessing: 'That your felt may be dense and durable, without exception!' and donated some money. Generally this was either two coins of contrasting colours, white and copper, or, if the person was well off, a silver coin. Those rolling the felt bought with this money confectionery and gingerbreads. This tradition was an unwritten law among the Kalmyks.

The new felt was smoothed, stretched and dried after being spread out on grass. After all this work, the hosts brewed tea in a large cauldron, cooked *bortsig*s and invited to a meal all their workers and neighbours. This providing of a meal was referred to as 'dedicated to the new felt' or as the 'felt tea'. Old men pronounced blessings. Then the old women scrutinized the felt, determined its quality and evaluated the workers' hard work.[4] This means of felt manufacture is unique: in the opinion of several specialists, it was found only among the Kalmyks. Among peoples with a closely similar

economy felt was rolled or dragged in a different way: among the Mongolians and Bashkorts, for example, riders on horseback rolled the felt over a level meadow. Taking up positions opposite each other on either side of the felt, they held ropes to which the roll of felt was tied. The Kyrgyz and Tuvins did the same, though not on horses but on foot.[5]

Felt of various colours was used in different ways. White felt was generally used for the covering of yurts and for the making of bedding accessories and bedding within the dwelling. Black felt went into the manufacture of saddle-cloths (which were placed under a horse's saddle), whereas other kinds of horse-cloths were made of either black or white felt. Sometimes felt was used to make stockings worn in cold seasons of the year by either women or men. The Kalmyks dared to sleep on the ground after spreading out a felt groundsheet, fearing neither poisonous snakes nor scorpions. This is related to the folk belief that scorpions, tarantulas and all poisonous spiders are afraid of sheep and the smell of their sweat, whereas snakes cannot stand the smell of horses.[6]

Spinning

Spinning was a not inconsequential occupation. For this a spindle (*ig*) was used, which consisted of a wooden ring on a baton with an aperture in the centre. From well carded wool were made *tüdig*s – small skeins that were used in winding the wool on the forefinger of the left hand. Threads of camel hair or sheep's wool were widely used by Kalmyk women around the farm or household, being put to a variety of uses. Only in setting up a yurt was it necessary to have round, flat, thick and thin ropes.

Rope making

Rope twisting was a long and labour-intensive task that was always carried out by women. The yarn, which had been prepared in the manner described above, was stretched in parallel rows with the help of simple gadgets: at first rows of threads were wound in pairs and then all together, rotating to the right. In this way a cord was produced.

The process of making wide braid rope was more complicated. Several rows of yarn were stretched out in parallel with two or three rows perpendicular to them. The ribbon was woven with the assistance of a wooden knife, which allowed the rows of threads to pass through one another. Multi-coloured threads were intertwined in the yarn to make the ribbon-like cord beautiful.

A decorative ribbon called *zeg*, which decorated the edge of the felt covering of a yurt, was plaited out of woollen fibres. Ready-made woollen threads went into the manufacture of braid for yurts. Cords of various thickness and length were made out of sheep's wool, camel hair and horse hair, depending on the person for whom they were intended. They served to fix a yurt in a definite location, to prevent the tent falling over in strong

winds. The places where the trellises for the yurt were joined to one another, as well as the places where these lattices were connected to the door frame, were secured with such rope. Horse hobbles, collars for calves, straps for bullocks and so on were also made from ropes of such a kind. The toughest ropes were those made of horse hair. Such ropes, made using a special plaiting, were adapted for lassoes, which were used for catching unbroken horses. As a rule, a lasso rope, always carefully folded, was tied to the saddle of every horse herder. At one end of such a lasso was a wooden ring. When a horse herder tossed a rope lasso at a horse, the noose quickly tightened on the horse's neck on account of this ring through which the rope passed. Horse-hair and camel-hair ropes were used as tethers, with which someone who had just dismounted tied up his horse.

Thick ropes woven out of camel and horse hair served to tie up household goods at the time of a migration, or to fasten hay on to wagons. Leashes for animals were made of these ropes too.

One of the duties also laid on the women was the making of threads from the sinews of larger animals, for sewing together leather vessels and stitching fur coats. On skinning domestic livestock the Kalmyks cut off the tendons to their maximum length and kept them in a solution of *bozo* (a kind of whey) for three to four days, after which they dried them in the sun. The dried out tendons were processed, being battered with a wooden beater, as a result of which they became soft and were readily split up into fine threads, from which the Kalmyks spun by hand long and very durable sinew threads. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century demand for this kind of household production had already begun to disappear and women began to use threads made by factories.

In districts where reeds and rushes grew – on the banks of the Volga and the Caspian Sea shore, and in the vicinity of steppe lakes and the backwaters of rivers – it was customary to weave mats from reed stems. At the end of August the Kalmyks chopped down the reeds or rushes with scythes or sickles (*hadur*). After drying, thin layers were stripped off from each plant, and from these the women wove mats. The earthen floor within a dwelling was covered with these mats, and felt was spread on them. The floor around the hearth was covered with them too, to prevent the felt floor of the dwelling from quickly becoming dirty. I. Zhitetskiy wrote that mats made out of reeds, some 175 centimetres in length and about 70 centimetres wide, were woven by a single person in the space of ten hours.[7]

Leather processing

A major niche in Kalmyk household production was occupied by the treating of leather and the hides of domestic animals, carried out, as a rule, in the summer or beginning of autumn. From the hides of sheep, calves and foals the Kalmyks manufactured thin, elastic goods: out of these kinds of leather they sewed children's and women's boots and shoes, and manufactured bags

for keeping money or tea in, as well as pillowcases for large pillows. Somewhat thicker hides went into the manufacture of leather from which they sewed boots or crafted horse harnesses, scabbards, whips and lashes. With the leather they fitted horse collars and saddles and it went into other household articles too. Out of the skins of large animals – camels, cows and horses – were made utensils such as buckets, vats, wash-tubs or *bortkho* vessels (described later in this chapter).

How were animal skins processed? The hides of small animals – sheep, goats and foals – were treated with whey or, more precisely, what was left after the distillation of *är'kä* (mare's milk 'vodka'), milky dregs that the Kalmyks call *bozo*. The hide was covered with this sediment and left in the open air. Two or three days later the process was repeated and then the hide was folded up and left for several days to dry. When the paste applied to the pelt had well soaked into it and dried out, the hide was cleared of any leaven with the help of a knife. An even, elastic skin was obtained. Chalk was rubbed into it, for several days it was kneaded by hand and it was then left to dry in the sun. From such hides were sewn fur coats, women's padded body-warmers and other warm items.[8]

Hides of large domestic animals were first cleaned by the removal of their inner layers, fat and membranes. Then the hides, stretched out, were thoroughly dried in the open air – either spread out on the grass with the hair underneath or hung up on a special cruciform pole. After being dried, the hides were kept for several days in a vat with a mixture composed of sour milk whey (*adamgin usn*) or of *bozo* with added salt. This was then cleaned off and the hide was again dried out in the open air. The thoroughly dried skin was then softened with blows from a wooden rap – up to a thousand or fifteen hundred times. Once the hide had been softened in this manner it was used in the manufacture of leather wares, which were widely used at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.[9] Rawhide was derived from cows' hides using a simple technique for processing. The skin was lowered into a tub of salted whey and kept in it for up to a week. Then the hide was pulled out and the hair removed with a knife: the hair came away easily. The hide was dried out a little in the sun and cut into strips of various lengths and widths. These straps went into the making of bridles, reins, breastplates, girth-straps, lashes, whips and other items.

Characteristics peculiar to livestock raising were reflected in the variety of the Kalmyks' household equipment, in which different kinds of lashes, whips and reins were utilized. There were two types of Kalmyk whips. The first kind – for driving bulls, camels and horses – was fashioned out of four straps with a metal ring on the handle. The second type was a whip used by shepherds and plaited from eight straps. This whip, which had a metal ring and a fringe on the handle, was considerably longer than the first type. The braiding of its straps creates a distinctive pattern, similar to the markings of a snake.[10]

Lashes (*malya*) were also varied, but, irrespective of its intended purpose, for the horseman any lash was a weapon feared by dogs and wolves. Likewise,

there were different kinds of lashes: out of twisted and dried rawhide was obtained a lash that was round and strong as a whip, whereas several layers of rawhide sewn throughout produced a flat lash. The most beautiful lashes were those made of eight or twelve thongs. The workmanship for such a lash demanded great skill and artistry. At first evenly thin thongs were cut out. For the core they took rawhide that had been rolled and dried out and was firm and flexible, like a switch, so that it would bend but not break. The lash was plaited around this foundation. Once it was ready, it was buried for four to five days in the ground. After this the lash became soft and elastic, like rubber. If the core did not break, the lash turned out to be first-rate. If it broke, it was a disgrace for the craftsman. Until being buried in the ground and after being exhumed the lash was copiously smeared with the spinal cord of a cooked sheep. Onto it was then hafted a handle made of strong wood such as boxwood or sandalwood. An aperture was made at the end of the handle, into which was inserted a loop of leather so that it was possible to hold the lash by it, or to hang it on the wall.

Sometimes lashes were woven out of horse hair. The core or foundation of such a lash was composed of rawhide leather. At its end the lash was strengthened by a so-called 'palm of the hand' made of leather, into which was sewn a small piece of lead. This was done so that the force of a blow with the lash was more powerful. By such a blow to the bridge of the nose, Kalmyk hunters could kill a wolf.

Right up to the beginning of the twentieth century the Kalmyks made use of horse, ox or camel hides for making vessels with a large capacity (*arhad*), in which they prepared kumiss or *chigyan* (a drink made of sour milk), or carried water. The skin of the head of large animals was used to make churns (*berve*) of an original type, which were intended for the keeping of *arkhi*, a vodka made from mare's milk. Such a vessel was sewn together from its two halves with a single seam, and was then packed out with sand or ashes, sometimes clay and humus, to impart the required specific shape to the vessel. A *berve* took the place of a thermos flask for the Kalmyks, because the processed camel hide excellently keeps the initial temperature of the liquid contained in it. From the skin of the legs and stomach of large animals were made buckets, hunting sacks and other vessels, and also straps that went into the manufacture of various wares used as harness parts – including bridles, halters, reins, saddle girths, stirrups, hip straps, breastplates, tail-straps, tethers, hobbles and tripods – as well as thick leather straps with which the trellises of the yurts were strengthened.

From camel skins skilled artisans made a wonderful utensil called a *bortkho*. For this the camel hide was lowered, with some yeast, into a trough, where it was kept for several days. After this the hair was removed with a sharp knife and the hide was dried in the air. When the skin had somewhat dried out, two identical parts – halves of the *bortkho* in the making – were cut out according to a particular template. After these parts were placed against one another, their rims were tightly and firmly sewn together and then the

sewn-up vessel was stuffed taut with damp clay. Outside, an earthen oven was made, for which pressed and dried dung was used as fuel. When the fire flared up, on to it was thrown damp wormwood, which gave off copious amounts of smoke, over which the *bortkho* was hung. Expert craftsmen engraved a drawing on the surface of the *bortkho* with a metal cutting tool. The leather acquired a dark red colour from the strong heat. Then it was taken from the fire and the clay with which it had been filled was knocked out. For the next five or six days the vessel was dried in the sun and then cleaned and rinsed within, and a metal, partially silver, lid with an engraving and a strap for a handle was fastened to it. After testing for firmness, an excellent vessel was obtained: it could be carried around on horses and camels without fearing that it would split and in the summer it could keep drinks cool without any danger that the contents would heat up in the sun. The capacity of the *bortkho* was two to three litres.

Hides of goats and sheep, including lambskins, were processed in a different way. This was done as follows: as soon as the sheep, goat or wild animal had been skinned its hide was sprinkled with salt; if the animal was too fatty, a little fine sand or clay was added to the salt. The hide was stretched out as far as it could go in all directions and a brine containing *bozo* was rubbed in. This was repeated eight to ten times. As a result the skin became very soft. After drying it was cleaned of any encrustation from the processing solution and was kneaded by hand, using a special rod some 70–80 centimetres in length, serrated on one side and well polished on the other. After this a special whitewash, derived from burnt gypsum (contained within the clays of streams and gullies), was rubbed into the sheepskin and wool. A sheepskin curried in such a way was noted for its exceptional softness, dryness and whiteness and the absence of an unpleasant smell. Out of such sheepskins women sewed sheepskin coats and overcoats. Processed goat skins went into the making of warm winter trousers. Lambskins and wool were used to make coats, hats and mittens valued by the Kalmyks. Warm winter clothes were also made from unshorn processed hides of early born lambs.

Carpentry

Wood was indispensable as a material for working with, primarily for making the wooden framework of a yurt. Usually the manufacture of a yurt's wooden parts was carried out by specialist carpenters from among the Kalmyks. There was little wood available in steppe localities; therefore the amount used was kept to a minimum. Wood was bought at trade fairs in neighbouring Russian villages, to which it was brought specially for the requirements of the Kalmyk population.[11]

The making of a saddle was done by a specialist in this craft. The master saddle-maker had to see to everything personally: the wood, harness and metal were put together by one and the same craftsman. Often Kalmyk

saddles were decorated in silver, for both men's and women's saddles. Women's saddles were distinguished from those of the men by being of a smaller size and more elegant. A beautiful saddle was a precious gift.[12] All the basic components of a Kalmyk saddle were made out of leather: the cushion, girth-bands, stirup straps and saddle-girths.

In each settlement there lived craftsmen who were involved in the manufacture of wooden beds, trunks (*avdyr*) and other containers in which were kept stores of foodstuffs. Such chests were also of various kinds; for better-off people they were decorated with carvings and inlaid with silver. Kalmyk craftsmen also made, out of wood, tubs of various sizes for kumiss and *chigyan* (besides keeping water in them), *dombo* vessels for tea and buckets for household use (which, incidentally, had metallic bands and a base inserted into them). Practically all the dishes used for everyday living in a Kalmyk household were wooden ones, the lightness and durability of which fully met the requirements of the people's mobile lifestyle.[13]

Wooden cups (*modn aaga*) of different sizes were made out of various kinds of trees: maple, alder, birch, elm and even hazel, hollowed out of suitable logs. Burl might be used too. Out of a whole lump of wood were chiselled wooden ladles (*shaanga*) and large, shallow, oblong wooden plates (*tevsh*) on which meat was served at weddings and banquets in the course of communal domestic tasks. In each household there was a large cup, called a *tavyg*, which was beautifully decorated as it was a dish for honoured guests – primarily older people and ministers of religion. The wood for the *tavyg* was turned on a lathe and was then carved out from the inside. However, according to a report by I. Bentkovsky, who personally observed the work of Kalmyk craftsmen in the middle of the nineteenth century, there were a good number of skilled craftsmen who carved out such articles by hand with a simple knife no worse than the ones made on a lathe.[14]

Special attention must be paid to pipes for smoking (*ganz*). Men's and women's pipes differed in size and proportion: women's pipes were correspondingly smaller and more delicate. According to the rules of etiquette one should offer one's own tobacco to others, and young girls always took the first few puffs to get a pipe going for their elders. The pipe and tobacco pouch were not simply indispensable items for every person but were also elements of prestige if they were expensive and refined. A smoking pipe was a kind of 'steppe passport' by which one could determine its owner's clan. Master wood carvers made pipes with long mouthpieces of oak and maple and embellished them with silver. All parts of a pipe had their own names and symbolism. A yurt was symbolized by the lid of a pipe, the chest of a frisky race horse by the front part, a horse's croup by the upper part, the slender legs of a horse by the mouthpiece and a lasso by the chain attached to the lid.[15] All these pieces were executed lovingly, as well as the metal pipe cleaner and the metal lid that covered the pipe while it was being smoked, so that it would not cause a fire.[16] Often pipes were decorated with metal, usually burnished silver.

A particular speciality among the woodworkers was the manufacture of musical instruments. Kalmyk musical culture at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries preserved a range of musical instruments, which the Kalmyks used both in daily life and on special occasions. Among them should be mentioned stringed instruments: the dombra, psaltery (jatha), *tovshur* and *mörin hur*, which was called the steppe violoncello. Representing wind instruments were bagpipes (*büshkür*). A significant place was occupied by instruments for religious ritual – the conch, small bells, drum and rattles – but generally they were imported from Tibet or Mongolia, or were manufactured according to religious rules, as they exhibit no Kalmyk ethnic attributes. In the nineteenth century the Kalmyks adopted the Saratov accordion, without which it is impossible to imagine Kalmyk music nowadays.

The most common instrument was the dombra (*dombr*). Both men and women played on this plucked instrument. The dombra was made out of sheets of pine and plywood, the rear part thinner, the front part thicker. The Kalmyk dombra had seven frets and two strings. The strings were formerly made out of a sheep's small intestine, worked in a particular manner. This is what is said about it in a popular riddle:

> The dry wood emits
> A wonderful sound,
> Like the neighing of a foal.

The *yatkha* was close in construction and sound to the Ukrainian bandura. This instrument was more frequently found in rich families, especially among the nobility. The body of the *yatkha* was over a metre in length, curving at one point towards a blunt end. Its neck was the smaller part. The *yatkha*'s sounds were melodic, as if rippling.

Another traditional Kalmyk instrument was the *mörin hur*, so called because the end of the finger-board was executed in the shape of a horse's head, and the sound of the bow could be reminiscent of a horse's whinny. From the stem of a reed, which grows in steppe lakes, the Kalmyks made reed pipes (*hulsn büshkür*). Sometimes the reed was put into a horn, and this was especially common among the Tersk and Kumsk Kalmyks. The *tovshur* had a pear-shaped body, hollowed out of a whole piece of wood, with a sounding-board too.[17] At one time the playing of the *tovshur* accompanied the performance of the epic, but later, at the time of the deportation, many musical instruments fell out of use, and the dombra alone remained out of all the stringed instruments.

For a long time after the return from deportation musicians were limited to just the dombra and Saratov accordion, but during the perestroika period in Kalmykia the creative intelligentsia made efforts to seek out old instruments, to reconstruct them and to return them to contemporary life. These attempts were successful. All the above-mentioned instruments can be heard

in Kalmykia today, and the number of professionally trained musicians who are living representatives of a performance culture allows one to be confident of the vitality of musical traditions.

Metalworking

In the field of metallurgy the most important job was that of the blacksmith, who had to satisfy demands for household utensils for use in livestock herding, agriculture and fishing. The smiths' bellows that had existed in the eighteenth century were lost. Therefore at the beginning of the nineteenth century iron in Kalmykia was heated on an open camp fire. Many Kalmyks had experience of working with metal and could themselves carry out repairs to agricultural implements and modes of transport, and could mend broken cast iron cauldrons, buckets and other iron hardware.[18]

Knives of various sizes and for differing purposes were made from imported steel and iron. All the time each man carried on his person three knives. One of them, a small *tangrg*, was for eating cooked meat. The second knife (*bala*) was hung from the belt on the left side in a special case, not infrequently decorated with silver. The third knife (*uthn*) was the longest and was worn behind the top of the boot. It was intended for use in economic pursuits: with it livestock was slaughtered, a carcass butchered and leather sliced up. It was also used for working in wood. Women's knives (*balig*) as well as two-handled tongs for the hearth and brands for the branded livestock were manufactured from fragments of iron scythes.

Specialist jewellers were called *urchud* in Kalmyk. They manufactured silver belts for men and maidens, rings, earrings and *tokug*s, produced holders for smoking pipes and ornamented hunting gear, saddles and bridles. The ornaments were manufactured out of silver coins (*tsagan möngn*) and when ordered by a customer the jeweller costed the work in silver coins too. Kalmyk craftsmen knew how to decorate their works with gilt. This was achieved as follows: an article soaked in nitric acid was rubbed, using a metallic rod, with an amalgam that was a mixture of old gold (*altn*) and mercury (*mengen usn*). Then the item was heated over an open fire.

Kalmyk jewellers used techniques of burnishing and covered silver with a mixture of tin, silver, copper, borax and sulphur. In the making of such a mixture they filled a cow's horn with a little sulphur, poured in the burning hot metals and smeared clay over the horn. Then with this mixture they filled up little incisions that had been cut on the surface of the goods with sharp instruments.

The demand for good jewellers always remained high and at the beginning of the twentieth century craftsmen from the Caucasus or of Tatar extraction sometimes came and dwelt for a while in Kalmyk *khoton*s, working to order. Therefore the ornamentation of neighbouring peoples entered Kalmyk life.

Folk art

Folk art played a major role in the nomadic life of the Kalmyks, adding decoration and enriching their lives. The most widespread kind of domestic work approximating to a high art form of applied decorative artistry was embroidery. All Kalmyk women could sew, having been taught this craft since childhood. The skills of women's handiwork, sewing and embroidery were especially valued in Kalmyk families. Moreover, on a number of occasions these occupations rescued the life of Kalmyk women in those hard years when the men were unable to feed their own families: those were the years of exile, in deportation or emigration, in the initial periods of which it was actually the women who supported their families by doing sewing jobs.

The most beautiful and finest folk creations were the handicrafts of Kalmyk women, but the women had at their disposal merely needle and thimble, scissors and thread, eyes and imagination, and also an artistic taste and sense of proportion that not infrequently is noted among contemporary Kalmyk women. First place was given by Kalmyk ladies to decorating their own clothing, and primarily their gowns, the *terleg*, *tsegdeg*, *biize*, the collars and cuffs of which were embroidered with silver, gold and silk threads. Designs and ornaments had their own names, such as 'Beijing city' (*Beezhin khoton*), 'colt's hoof', 'the rotation of the sun' and 'rainbow'. Items apart from clothing that were decorated with ornamentation included tobacco pouches, purses, sewing boxes, pillows (*der boktso*) and foot-cushions (*köl boktso*). However, the most beautiful embroidery, which was carried out to last a long time and sometimes even be passed on as an heirloom, was on the headgear and on the false shirt-fronts. In time, male and female dress became worn out but the dicky or the headgear was left.

All of a woman's labour-intensive work was carried out with one needle. In Kalmyk riddles it is said about this needle: 'A black horse runs with a very little jog-trot' and 'Where the head goes, the tail goes too'. As an aside, it could be mentioned that skilled women had their own rules. Hence, the length of a thread had to be such that its longer end reached to the elbow but the other one was half that length. If a careless girl threaded a needle with a long thread, then, according to a popular superstition, it would be a long time before she got married. She was thereby scared off using a long thread that would get tangled up and mess up neat work.

One of the most popular types of ornamentation was connected with the solar cult. The sun was portrayed not only as one circle but as several concentric circles, most often in three concentric circles or as a circle with branches or petals coming from it to one side, as if forming a kind of 'whirlwind rosette'. Related to the signs of the sun were the cross and swastika. The cross was taken as a coordinating emblem of the countries of the world.[19]

A special place in ornamentation was taken up by representations of animals and birds, among which primarily should be listed the eagle, horse, deer, snake and imaginary beings that played a role as protective charms

and talismans.[20] The semantics of the 'ram's horn' (*eer ugalz*) pattern were also of interest. This widely distributed ornament symbolized, on the one hand, the herder's wealth, well-being and prosperity, but, on the other hand, the representation of horns must have played a magical role as a protector – that is, as a talisman with the ability to frighten off evil spirits. Buddhist symbols also came into folk ornamentation. Among them should be mentioned primarily the eight jewels and also the 'yin–yang' symbol widespread in Asia.

One of the commonly found types of decorative applied arts of the Kalmyks was wood carving. Wooden beds were very commonly decorated with carving. Trunks and boxes for keeping utensils were decorated with bas-relief and three-dimensional carvings, and then painted, repeating these designs. Carvings were used to decorate bed legs, tables, tobacco pipes, walking sticks, details in musical instruments and chess pieces – which were represented by depictions of animals or of imaginary beings.[21]

In their embroidery and paintings, a distinguishing characteristic in the art of the Kalmyks – as indeed among other Mongolian peoples – was the colouring. This has been noted by many researchers. National master artists employed only pure colours, not using watered-down or dull tones. It was important that the colours themselves also went on in a definite sequence. In Kalmyk ornamentation we encounter all well known types: geometric, zoomorphic, vegetative and the representation of elemental forces. The predominating types of ornament are East Asian, Sayano-Altaic and southern Siberian, plus many elements of Northern Siberian types.[22] It is thought that a Kalmyk woman, a dweller of the steppe, reproduced in the pictures on her embroidery everything that she saw around her: the sun and moon, the rainbow and the zigzag of lightning in the sky, the felt tent and hills.

The Kalmyk art of embroidery with wool and gold is distinguished by diversity in its seam techniques, among which the most common is a decorative double-sided seam and composite satin stitches arranged according to the number of threads in a straight or oblique direction on the vertical and horizontal stitches. Often chain-stitches and feather-stitches were also used and the satin-stitch had from one to four layers, sewn on to one another in order to impart a sense of depth or relief to part of the embroidery pattern. Single-sided embroideries in gold were more common still. Specialists in the field of decorative applied arts of the Kalmyks reckon that most characteristic of Kalmyk embroidery was a combination of sewing in gold and silver, lacework and stripes made out of ribbons of braid and brocade. The braid, brocade and fur borders served as frames for the needlework. The embroidery itself was basically composed of stripes with lace figures, in which free spaces were taken up by needlework in gold or silver. Embroideries combining gold with techniques of superimposed lace and stripes made out of bands of braid or brocade ribbons helped to achieve a great decorative effect. In such a manner, typically a Kalmyk ornamental design included superimposed lace (*zeeg*), sewing with threads (*hathmyr*), embroideries in braid (*küsme*) and brocade (*chimkere*) and edging in lace (*utsyn*).

10 Religion, the calendar and festivals

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries every Kalmyk family gave up one of its sons to study in a monastry.

Pre-Buddhist beliefs

For many centuries archaic cults such as ancestor veneration, sun worship, a fertility cult or various kinds of magic had been predominant in the Kalmyks' worldview. The cult of the sun is a basic one among all Mongolian peoples, and in many cases it was transmuted into a cult of fire – as a manifestation of the sun. Right up to the present time there is much in the Kalmyk culture that is subordinated to the regulations of the solar cult. Movement in the same direction as the sun is one of the mandatory rules of folk etiquette: to come up to the nomad tent, to depart or to pass on something in a circle could only be done according to the movement of the sun, in a direction from left to right. A breach of the solar order, movement contrary to the sun's direction, was tolerable only on breaking the usual pattern of life – for example, if a divorce was at the woman's initiative she was compelled to circle a temple three times in the opposite direction to that of the sun.

The hearth was the most sacred place in the house: semantically, it was somewhat akin to having a little sun in each home. Therefore an especially respectful attitude was required towards the hearth and the fire within the hearth. It was forbidden to splash water into the hearth, to throw rubbish into it, to touch the fire with a knife or any other sharp implement or to sleep with one's legs stretched out in a direction towards the hearth. Ritual food in the form of the sun and solar ornamentation in embroidery are enduring motifs in Kalmyk culture. All that is most excellent is compared with the sun. For example, in order to convey convincingly how fine was Mingiyan, the first handsome man of the universe in the *Jangar* epic, it is said: the woman came out from the nomad tent and was unable to understand how it was as if there were two suns in the sky, to the east and to the west; it was Mingiyan approaching from the western side.[1]

The cult of ancestors, in our own day, manifests itself first of all in the custom of remembering ancestors on the occasions of the ceremonial *yoräl*

well wishing and in the custom of *tsatsal*, the ritual sprinkling of the first portion of tea or vodka. This is done in the following manner: after pronouncing his good wishes the *yorälchi* lowers his third finger into a cup of sacred drink and splashes it around in all four directions with a movement of the fingers, in an upward direction.

Closely connected with the cult of the ancestors are concepts that older relatives, when dying, give away their happiness (*kishg*) to their descendants. However, there also occurs a negative manifestation of the soul of the dead, which in common parlance is called *tachal*. *Tachal* can be, according to popular notions, either 'good' or 'bad'. A good *tachal* occurs if the recently dead person was very attached to a particular person among the living. The yearning for the living relative by the one who has departed this life leads to the living person starting to become ill and even dying. A bad *tachal* begins to operate if those who were close to the dead person did not conduct themselves sorrowfully enough in the period of mourning, or, in another situation, if the dead person himself was notable for having an unfriendly disposition or had reasons to depart from life while bearing a grudge against living relatives.

There existed time-honoured methods for guarding against *tachal*. One of the methods consisted of the following: out of pastry was modelled a small figurine of a person, in which it was necessary to have hidden finger and toe nails and hair cut from that person. This figurine was then passed over the body of the person who needed to be protected from the effects of the *tachal*. After this the miniature of the person had to be thrown away at midnight at the junction of three roads.

Fertility magic is manifested right up to the present day, in so far as grains of rice or millet are without fail scattered in the house where a person has recently died. The grains symbolize fertility, and the fertility of nature transfers across into the fertility of man and society.

Shamanism

Prior to the adoption of Buddhism, shamanism had occupied a significant position as the state religion of the Kalmyk khanate. The struggle with shamanism began in the sixteenth century. As early as 1640 conflict with shamans as state policy is reflected in the corpus of laws called the 'Great Code' (*Iki Tsaazhin bichg*). Contained in the statutes are coercive measures prohibiting shamanic actions, as well as the repression of representatives of the so-called 'black faith'. Accordingly, in the code's text is written: 'Take the horse from a person who invites in a shaman or shamaness, and take the horse from the shamaness who had arrived; if anyone sees and does not take one, then take a horse from that person.'[2] Shamanic practices, despite the unfavourable social conditions, were preserved in Kalmyk society. Participants in academic expeditions that visited the Astrakhan steppe in the eighteenth century wrote about it. They mentioned that among the Kalmyks they met shamans (*bö*, *ubasantsa*, *udugun*) who to that day were practising in

Kalmykia. Despite the fact that for a long time representatives of the Buddhist religion had been fighting with the shamans, and after that the Soviet regime too, demand for their practices has never disappeared. Moreover, in Soviet times the authorities regarded Buddhist priests as their main ideological enemy, and against this background shamanic practices were not as dangerous, although there remained a risk in such pursuits. Such kinds of practitioners are reappearing in various localities in Kalmykia – referring here to actual bearers of the tradition, and not charlatans, who, evidently, have sometimes tried to occupy this niche. Not infrequently they combine their gift with that of the *medlgchi* (sages), some of whom also call themselves *säküstä* ('one having a guardian spirit'). These are male or female healers who in practice make use of various kinds of magic. The basic functions of all modern shamans are divination and curing.

Several dozen shamans or *medlgchi* are currently practising in Kalmykia. As a rule, they are solitary women who at one time had a family, but later suffered personal tragedies, losing their spouse. Until then many of them had not apprehended their preordained vocation. However, from some such time they began to be seriously ill and something unfathomable began to happen with their health that was not subject to treatment by contemporary medical means. So, according to the account of one *medlgchi*, she unexpectedly began to put on weight and in time could not wear her own clothes or shoes and could wear only household slippers. When she walked on the ground, it sank and her footsteps were deep. She began to notice that she was becoming absent-minded and to complain about her memory. It was only then that those near to her guessed what was happening to her: the signs that she was not fulfilling the vocation appointed for her from above. Her mother told her that all this – the surplus weight and problems with her memory – were signs that she had to cure children. This woman had to renounce absolutely the imbibing of any alcoholic drinks, which she had not been keen on previously either. Having lost her husband, this *medlgchi* conducted a sexually abstemious way of life. The impartation of the gift of *medlgchi* always takes place through illness, suffering or danger, which are signs of his or her special vocation.

Normally contemporary shamans – and in Kalmykia there are considerably more women among them – must observe some kind of ethical code according to the pattern of their predecessors. There are two basic rules of this code: to forgive any deed or thought of each person who had come for help and to refrain from being a money-grubber in any circumstances, not demanding a high material reward for one's work but being content with any form of gratitude. Most frequently the basic service for which the contemporary population turn to *medlgchi* is for healing from illnesses in situations incapable of being treated successfully by the medical help of official state establishments, such as cures for infertility, sexual disorders, alcohol dependency or allergic ailments. Not uncommonly those brought for treatment are babes-in-arms with evidence of danger to their lives, and at times also with medically unexplained symptoms of irritability, crying and being

unsettled. Often the shamans are also asked to remove curses, take away 'black energy', perform the necessary rites in love magic for attracting or for turning someone off or tell fortunes. In recent years their clients have not infrequently been entrepreneurs who attempt to use otherworldly powers to prop up a risky (in Russian conditions) business, by means of having the ritual of 'opening the way' performed for them: this rite is invoked to take away various impediments to the resolution of business issues.

Buddhism in Kalmykia

The Kalmyks identify themselves as Mahayana Buddhists and as disciples of a reformer of Buddhism, Jonkhava (known as 'Tsong Khapa' in Tibetan Buddhism). Buddhist ideas were twice adopted by the Kalmyks. The first period was between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the foundation of Buddhist doctrine are laid ten virtues that have to be performed as much as possible, and ten 'anti-virtues' that are antipathetic to a person's life. The ten virtues consist of: (a) mercy and protecting the life of living beings; (b) charity; (c) selfless aid; (d) a chaste life; (e) reconciliation with one's antagonists; (f) cordial speech; (g) conducting oneself according to Buddhist teachings; (h) being content with one's condition in life; (i) helping one's neighbour; (j) belief in predestination.

The ten evil deeds are divided into three groups. The first group comprises the following: (a) taking the life of living beings; (b) theft; (c) adultery. These are joined together because in committing these acts the carnal side of man reveals itself most of all. The second group is made up of four acts: (d) lying; (e) backbiting; (f) swear words; (g) idle talk. In the committing of all these evil acts a person's mouth plays the main role. The third subdivision is composed of: (h) rude social conduct; (i) malice in one's heart; (j) avarice.[3] They are classified in a special subgroup because, according to the clergy's opinion, they lie in the nature of man. As Kol'donga Sodnom writes, 'they are not actions but reasons for actions. They motivate people to commit the most harmful deeds and the most awful crimes, and so in Buddhism they are designated as "the three cardinal evils" in the nature of man.'[4]

However, Buddhism became a religion of the masses only in the seventeenth century, when Kalmyk society possessed developed feudal relationships. Its acceptance was facilitated by the way in which many topical socio-political and ideological problems were solved with the help of the new religion. Among these were the consolidation of social relationships that had been taking shape – the establishment of a political union of fragmented princedoms among themselves and with other Buddhist states – and the union of temporal and spiritual powers.[5]

The basic stages in the history of Kalmyk Buddhism are tightly connected with the people's political history. The following steps in the acceptance and development of Buddhism have been delineated by scholars of Kalmyk Buddhism.

The spread of Buddhism in the seventeenth century facilitated the advancement of the Kalmyk people. At that time a political unification of the Kalmyks was taking shape on the banks of the Volga: the Kalmyk khanate. The doctrines of the new religion became the ideology of the strengthened feudal class. In the history of the religion itself, this was the stage of a struggle with shamanism and the emergence of a clerical organization and liturgical system. The period from the beginning of the eighteenth century until 1771 was the time of the Kalmyk khanate's greatest flowering, activation of its foreign policies and intensification of links with its 'ideological patron', Tibet. For Kalmyk Buddhism this was the time of closest and most active contacts with the rest of the Buddhist world. However, from 1741 Khan Donduk-Dashi was obliged to accept a stipulation of the Tsarist government concerning the abrogation of autonomous foreign relations. A weakening of links with the outside world was conducive to a reinforcement of the religion.

The year 1771 was a tragic time in the history of the Kalmyk people. A large part of the nation – about 30,000 households – under the leadership of Ubushi khan set off in the direction of Jungaria but only a small number reached their goal. In the Volga region twelve thousand tents (i.e. households) were left. After 1771 and the abolition of the khanate a new system of leadership was formed for the Kalmyk nation. In the ecclesiastical organizations this period was marked by a rapid growth in monasteries and clergy. In the second half of the nineteenth century a precise ecclesiastical functioning could be observed within the framework of legal 'limits' worked out by the Tsarist government. At the same time an institute for temple disciples was set up. Temples of a provisional type made their appearance and there was an increase in the number of established ones.

At the beginning of the twentieth century connections were strengthened with the rest of the Buddhist world – with Buryatia, and through it with Mongolia – a consequence of which was the opening in Kalmykia of two *Tsannid Cherya* higher spiritual-religious philosophical schools. At this time there appeared a renewal movement, represented by the activities of M. Bormanschinov and B. Bovayev, who advocated returning to a purified form of Buddhism. The first spiritual congress was held on 9 July 1923, and in 1927 the All-Union Spiritual Buddhist Synod took place in Moscow. In these same years repression began of the *sangha* (Buddhist clergy) and temples were shut down and destroyed. By the beginning of the Second World War practically all temples (*khurul*s) were closed and the clergy exiled or compelled to relinquish their calling.

From August 1942 to January 1943 a significant part of Kalmykia was occupied by German troops. The new occupying powers, in order to attract the local population, opened a working temple in Elista, and tried to conduct their propaganda through the clergy. About twenty Buddhist monks who during the occupation had begun to conduct services were compelled to leave, following the retreating German units. They later opened prayer

centres in camps for displaced persons in Germany, and after that in the USA opened four Buddhist temples in Howell, New Jersey. (It was virtually a year after the liberation of the republic that the Kalmyks were deported.) Much temple property was ruined at the time of the Kalmyks' deportation.

After the restoration of autonomy the question of opening a *khurul* did not come up for many years and it became possible only in the period of perestroika. Nevertheless, a need for religious practices continued to be preserved among the Kalmyk population. Unofficial centres for Buddhists to gather in were operating in the republic at the places of residence of former clergy who continued to perform ceremonies despite oppression. Most important were reckoned to be centres such as the settlement of Tsagan Aman, which until 1980 was the residence of O. M. Dorjiyev, a highly educated lama with a scholastic degree from Gevshe, the village of Troitskoye, where Sanji Ulyumjinov resided, and, until 1985, the state farm Zalivnoy, where the famous *gelüng* Namka Kichikov was living.

The position as of 1 November 1995 was that twenty-one Buddhist communities had been registered. People with a Buddhist worldview were organized in a union of Buddhists of Kalmykia. The president of the association was the Shajin Lama Telo Tulku Rimpoche. It ought to be mentioned that after the opening of the first prayer house in Elista in 1988, Buddhist monks of Buryat origin, who had received their education in Mongolia, were invited to work in it. However, they performed the services according to a Buryat regional ritual model, which is at variance with the Kalmyk one (which for a long period had developed autonomously and had acquired its own ethnically specific features). The introduction of foreign rituals provoked dissatisfaction among the older generation of Kalmyks. This mood led to the twenty-year-old Telo Tulku Rimpoche, a Kalmyk citizen of the USA and a disciple of the Dalai Lama, being invited to be head of the Buddhists of Kalmykia. The arrival of His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who has already visited Elista twice, created a sensation for the inhabitants of the republic. With regard to the opening of *khurul*s in the republic's regions, an acute problem has arisen in the training of clerics. At the present time nineteen young people are in India receiving appropriate education in Buddhism. For a long time a primary task in Kalmykia's religious life was the construction of Elista's Säküsn Süme *khurul*, which was opened on 5 October 1996. Religious institutions for spiritual education are being opened in proportion to the strengthening of the position of Buddhism in the spiritual life of the Kalmyk Republic. In September 1995 a branch of the Karmapa (India) institute (of the Buddhist Karma-Kag'yu school) was opened in Elista, the lectures of which are attended by twenty-five students from different regions of Russia and the CIS, including eleven representatives of Kalmykia. On completion of the construction of the Säküsn Süme monastery complex it is planned to open an institute of Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan medicine (of the Buddhist Gelugpa school). Regarding the great need for clergy, the training of whom should begin in the

Figure 10.1 The Säküsn Süme *khural* located outside Elista. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

Figure 10.2 Inside the Säküsn Süme *khural*. Photo: Sophie Loubaton.

childhood years, the leader of the Buddhists of the province of Xinjiang (People's Republic of China), Shal'van Gegyan, with whom close contact has been maintained, has promised to direct Kalmyk priests from China's monasteries to work in *khurul*s in Kalmykia.

Domestic piety has played a great role in the Kalmyks' religious practice. In every home, as already noted above, there was a small altar. In the place of honour in the nomadic tent, and later in stationary dwelling houses or apartments, were to be found items used for religious purposes: portraits, statuettes or small altar lamps. Usually they had to be set out at a level higher than the 'usual horizontal' – for example, higher than the surface line of a table. The owners of the home attempted to have this altar in the eastern part of the house, or else opposite the door. At the time of all festivals, and occasionally also for mourning purposes, they lit the lamps in the house and placed *deedji*, the first symbolic portion of ritual food, near to the altar. Into the lamps they poured melted butter (*shar tosn*) and they prepared a wick, usually out of a match with cotton wool wound around it. In the years of the deportation, when there were no metallic lamps to hand, the Kalmyks used a raw potato, from which they cut out a small amount, or modelled out of dough something similar to the shape of a lamp. In recent years photographs of spiritual people or of religious paintings have also begun to be used as sacred images. Three days in the month – 8, 16 and 30 – were fast days (*matsg ödr*) for believing people. On these days one was supposed to eat only food allowed for a fast. Believers usually assembled on such days in groups and prayed together, shared a meal and spent time in quiet conversation for the duration of the 24 hours, not being distracted with temporal matters.

Buddhist monasteries in Kalmykia

The spread of Buddhism among the Oirats saw the appearance of the first worship buildings, which were both stationary and mobile. The town of Semipalatinsk on the river Irtysh was named in 1616 after the ruins of one of the first Oirat stone monasteries, called Syem' palat (meaning in Russian 'seven chambers'). A well known Buddhist monastery is Ablain-kit, founded in 1654 by Ablai-taisha, as were other Kalmyk religious buildings in Siberia and Central Asia.

Nomadic monasteries were accommodated in ordinary tents, which were called *khurla ger*. Externally they were distinguished by a *ganjiru*, a Buddhist symbol in the form of a spire. The design of such a monastery was circular, as was that of a residential tent settlement. In the centre of the circle a prayer tent and the tent of the senior priest were arranged. Around the outer circle the residential tents of the monks were distributed. A nomadic type of monastery was kept up among the Kalmyks throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[6] The number of monasteries quickly grew on the Kalmyk steppe, where in 1836 the recorded number of *khurul*s was

105, in which 5270 clergy were working. In the 1850s the number of *khurul*s came to seventy-six or seventy-seven, according to different sources. The spread of building techniques stimulated a growth in stationary temples. According to an account by the administration of the Kalmyk people in 1872, six stone buildings and 151 wooden ones had been counted.[7]

A consequence of the establishment of Buddhism among the Kalmyks was the formation of the Kalmyk clergy into a hierarchical structure. Degrees of ordination within holy orders were distinguished by the extent of spiritual consecration. The lowest rank of Buddhist monasticism among the Kalmyks was called *manji*; it could be received at the age of seven to ten years. Such a child, handed over by his parents to the monastery to become a novice, had to answer correctly forty questions, after which he took an oath that he would accept a lama mentor, serve him faithfully, fulfill his orders and bring him offerings. After such an oath the rite of initiation was performed: the boy's hair was shaved, ablutions were carried out, he was handed his religious clothes and cup, and he was given a new spiritual name. At the conclusion of the ritual the newly initiated monk uttered an oath of loyalty to the three 'jewels': the Buddha, the doctrine and the community of monks.

After studying a number of disciplines, the *manji* at the age of seventeen or eighteen took his next vow, that of a *getsül*. The procedure consisted of examining whether or not there were any impediments to his ordination into the holy order of *getsül*. For this, questions were addressed not to the examinee himself but to his mentor. After that the ordinand gave a promise to observe certain rules: not to kill a living being, not to take for oneself what belongs to another, not to commit adultery, not to take part in pageants, songs or dances, not to wear golden or silver ornamentation, not to drink wine and not to give oneself to gluttony. *Getsül*s had to take part in divine services and to know the rituals and sacred texts.

Once the *getsül* had completed some years of blameless practice in the monastery, at the age of twenty to twenty-five years he received the higher spiritual order of *gelüng*. The rite of ordination was performed in a temple in the presence of all the *khurul*'s clergy and on this occasion the ordinand took 253 vows.[8]

In Kalmyk monasteries the clergy differed not only according to their spiritual rankings but also by their allotted duties. In the *khurul*'s administrative apparatus researchers have distinguished the following occupational titles:

1 *Baksha*: the *khurul*'s abbot.
2 *Tsorzhi*: the *gelüng* who conducted ceremonies, appointing clergy to carry out one or another ritual, discharging them for rest and supervising their study of books.
3 *Gebkui*: the one responsible for the maintenance of order at times of worship; he also investigated misdemeanours by clergy. Usually in the *khurul*s there were supposed to be two older and two younger *gebkui*s.

4 *Geik*: a *gebkui*'s helper.
5 *Gunzud*: a chanter who started off the recitation of each prayer; in each *khurul* there were supposed to be two older and two younger *gunzud*s, plus two others unrestricted in terms of their age.
6 *Gonir*: the one who had to ensure that all ritual objects necessary for the services were in order.
7 *Nirva*: a steward and bursar who managed the economic life of *khurul*s; under his direction were offerings from lay people of money, objects, food, livestock etc.
8 *Zama*: a *nirva*'s assistant, answerable for the clergy's diet.
9 *Tsarvuchi*: the person who on the occasion of large ceremonies proffered 'holy water' and took round tea and food.
10 Monks from among the novices (*manji*) who played musical instruments and *burhachi* and who looked after cleanliness.

The duties of the *baksha* and *tsorzhi* were usually occupied by individuals with the status of *gelüng. Getsül*s occupied the posts of *gebkui*, *gunzud*, *geik*, *nirba* and *zama*. The remaining posts were occupied by novices (*manji*). Clerics with the rank of gelüng conducted the most important affairs in the monasteries. The *baksha* studied and interpreted Buddhist dogmas, recited prayers and performed rituals. The *emchi* doctor was responsible not only for healing and the preparation of medicines but also for undertaking a prolonged (twenty-year) training in Tibetan medicine. Among other things,

Figure 10.3 A ritual being conducted by Buddhist lamas. Photo: Nikolai Boshev.

the *zyrkhachi*-astrologer compiled the calendar, predicted fortunes and divined which days would be auspicious or inauspicious for the accomplishment of various tasks. The *zurachi* artist painted images of the deities (*burkhan*s) and decorated small prayer houses (*süme*).

G. Dorjiyeva, a scholar of Kalmyk Buddhism, writes that, according to a register taken in 1836, there were on average fifty officiating clergy in large khuruls and twenty-five in smaller ones.[9] At the beginning of the twentieth century there were 113 large and small *khurul*s among the Kalmyks: 100 temples were located on the Kalmyk steppe proper and 13 in the settlements of the Don Kalmyks, on the lands of the Don horde.

Buddhist art

Being cultural centres of Kalmykia, the *khurul*s possessed uniquely preserved works of religious art. Buddhist art in Kalmykia was based entirely on Indo-Buddhist culture, which throughout Asia approximated to the kind of significance that classical Mediterranean culture held for Europe.[10] Most widespread in Buddhist art among the Kalmyks were sculptured representations of personages in the pantheon, murals on the walls of stone temples and, of course, iconography, which used a variety of techniques: appliqué work and embroidery on cloth, or printed on paper. The most well known forms of Kalmyk Buddhist art were the mandala and the thanka.

A mandala is a highly coloured diagrammatic representation that was used in the practice of invocation in temple services. Depictions of a mandala on canvas – there were also mandalas on paper and in sand – portrayed a Buddhist representation of a specific universe. As a rule it is a circle inserted into a square, which in turn is also inserted into a circle. The inner circle schematically looks like an eight-petalled lotus. The square, in which is inserted an eight-segmented circle, is strictly orientated to the four quarters of the earth, each quarter having its own corresponding colour. On the four sides of the square are set out figures of characters in the pantheon, symbolizing the spatial divisions of the universe.[11] Different variants of the mandala were dependent upon whichever deity the mandala was devoted to.

Thankas represented iconographic portrayals of characters in the Buddhist pantheon. In the first place it was an image of Buddhas – 'enlightened beings' – who are counted as sons of Adibuddha, the high deity of unearthly essence who had given a beginning to the earth. The word 'Buddha' is translated from Sanskrit as 'enlightened one': this is one who had attained Nirvana and had been set free from earthly suffering. Buddhas are classified according to their individual functions. Without doubt, however, the most important personage is Buddha Shakyamuni (Burhn Bakshi Gegän). In Kalmyk thankas he is most frequently depicted in the lotus position, seated on a lotus throne. Also depicted in thankas are Bodhisattvas, who are potential Buddhas but have turned down Nirvana for the sake of the salvation of others. Bodhisattvas can be either female or male. Especially

popular among the Kalmyks were the eleven-faced Avolokiteshvara and the White and Green Taras (*Tsagan Därke* and *Nogan Därke*), who were female deities. Incidentally, Catherine the Great was declared in her day to be one of the incarnations of the White Tara as a gracious protectress of the Kalmyk clergy. In the thankas there are also depictions of historical figures, teachers and preacher-monks who had reached a high earthly stage of perfection. We Kalmyks esteem most of all the portrait of a reformer of Buddhism named Zunkva Gegän.

Distinguished by their form of representation are personal deities, the yidams, who are separated into angry, peaceful and peaceful–angry ones. Usually the yidams are depicted in black or dark blue, crowned with a diadem of five human skulls (symbolizing five earthly pollutions) and with a necklace from the heads of 'infidels'. The dynamic of the yidam's pose – a frenzied dance in tongues of fire – underlines the power and strength of a personage fulfilling protective functions.[12] In Kalmyk society the most common iconographic image among male yidams was that of Yamantaka and among female yidams (who were called dakinis) was the image of Simkhavaktri, who has the head of a lion.

Similar to images of yidams were representations of the Dharmapalas (*dokshit*), who were conceived of as defenders of the faith and of the purity of teaching, and as guardians of the faithful from various seductions and false ways. The image of Mahakali, for example, simply includes attributes of yidams: the 'skull cup' (a vessel made from the upper part of the human cranium), a trident and a chain. Most well known of all was nevertheless a female personage, Lhamo, who was especially widespread in Mongolia, Buryatia and Kalmykia. Lhamo was a demonic deity, the protectress of the secrets of life and death, the keeper of time.

The calendar

The system of chronology used among the Kalmyks, and among the majority of peoples of Eastern and Central Asia right up to the beginning of the twentieth century, was based on a lunar–solar calendar. This calendar was introduced for the first time among the Oirats, or rather among all the Mongolian peoples, in the thirteenth century by Emperor Khubilai. Until this time the Oirats possessed their ancient calendar, which at the present time has not been well studied by scholars. Nevertheless, the names of some months of this old calendar have been preserved: *tsagan sar*, *ürüs sar* and *tooldg sar*.[13]

Observations of the moon's movement around the earth (the month), of the earth around the sun (the year) and of Jupiter around the sun (a revolution equal to twelve earthly years) served as an astronomical basis for the lunar–solar calendar. The calendar's basis is composed of a twelve-year cycle including the names of twelve animals: *bar*, tiger or snow leopard; *tuula*, hare; *lu*, dragon; *moga*, snake; *mörn*, horse; *khön*, sheep; *möchn*, monkey;

Table 10.1 The traditional Kalmyk calendar

Approximate correspondence to the Gregorian calendar	*Kalmyk calendar*	*Seasons by the Kalmyk-Mongolian system*
February	*lu* (dragon)	First spring month
March	*moga* (snake)	Second spring month
April	*mörn* (horse)	Third spring month
May	*khön* (sheep)	First summer month
June	*möchn* (monkey)	Second summer month
July	*taka* (hen)	Third summer month
August	*nokha* (dog)	First autumn month
September	*gakha* (pig)	Second autumn month
October	*khulgn* (mouse)	Third autumn month
November	*ükr* (cow)	First winter month
December	*bar* (tiger)	Second winter month
January	*tuula* (hare)	Third winter month

taka, hen; *nokha*, dog; *gakha*, pig; *khulgn*, mouse; *ükr*, cow. The months of the cow, snow leopard and hare are regarded as winter months, the dragon, snake and horse as spring months, the sheep, monkey and hen as summer months and those of the dog, pig and mouse as autumnal months. How this calendar corresponds with the Gregorian one is shown in Table 2.[14]

In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries the first month of the year was the month of the mouse. This is the subject of a Kalmyk folk tale. Once all the animals got together and began to decide which month would be the first in the year. They decided that they would name the first month of the year in honour of whichever animal was the first to see the sun at dawn. The elephant had the best chance of being first to see the sun, but the wily mouse climbed up on to his head and saw the sun first. After that New Year (*Zul*) began with the month of the mouse. However, in the nineteenth century the year started to commence from the month of the snow leopard (tiger).

Often a person's character is thought to be determined by the year in which that person was born. Thus a man born in the year of the hen should be like a cock – that is, be amorous, love finery and try to be the centre of attention – whereas somebody born in the year of the dragon guards his home and family from bolts of lightning. According to an old superstition, the year in which a person is born would always carry for that person the most danger, misfortune and illness. Since Kalmyks thought that a person was born already a year old, taking into consideration pre-natal development, they reckoned the ages of thirteen and twenty-five to be dangerous, but especially dangerous the ages of thirty-seven and forty-nine, if one counted it in the Kalmyk way. In order to survive the 'dangerous' years successfully, it was vital to perform a rite for the prolongation of years (*nasan uttullgn*).

Apart from the twelve-year lesser cycle, use of the lunar–solar calendar also supposed the existence of a greater cycle of sixty years. For designating

this 'wheel of time' the Kalmyks used the Tibetan word *rabzhun*. A *rabzhun* is composed of five lesser cycles, each of which is associated with the five elements – wood (*modn*), fire (*gal*), earth (*shora*), iron (*temr*) and water (*usn*) – and with five colours – blue, red, yellow, white and black. Each year also possessed a characteristic gender: to be masculine and hard, or feminine and soft. As in any calendar, this is also symmetrical: six hard years, the years of the mouse, tiger, dragon, horse, monkey and dog, had six corresponding soft years, those of the cow, hare, snake, sheep, hen and pig. As a point of departure, the date of Buddha Shakyamuni's departure into Nirvana (2133 BCE) was taken. A lifetime consisted of a *rabzhun* and in that way was counted as sixty years. On attaining sixty years, a person was supposed to perceive each day lived on beyond that as a gift of heaven, and to pray more.

From time immemorial the twenty-four hour period (*hong*) has served as a basic measure of time. By the folk calendar the hong was divided into dawn (*örün örla*), mid-morning (*örün üd*), twilight (which can be light, *büril*, half-light, *gegätä*, or dark, *tash harangu*), midnight (*söni öräl'*) and the period from midnight until dawn (*er tsähä*).[15]

The week was composed of seven days, named after the planets: *Bembä garg ödr* (Saturn), Saturday; *Narn garg ödr* (day of the Sun), Sunday; *Sar garg ödr* (day of the Moon), Monday; *Megmer garg ödr* (the day of Mars), Tuesday; *Ulümdzhi garg ödr* (day of Mercury), Wednesday; *Pürvä garg ödr* (day of Jupiter), Thursday; and *Basng garg ödr* (day of Venus), Friday.

Clocks were not known to the Kalmyks. However, in the solar day at any time of year a part of the day was determined by reference to which part of the nomad's tent and precisely which articles within it the sunlight was falling on to through the dwelling's top aperture. As the tent's entrance was usually orientated towards the south, and the organization of space within any tent was identical, it was possible to see a system of determining time by the sun's rays. This system was defined like a twenty-four hour zodiac, made up of twelve double hours, each of which was designated by the name of an animal. Moreover, each animal was associated with a definite sector of the tent's living space set aside for its own economic activity. Thus, when a ray of light fell on the wall where household utensils were kept, such as a bucket for milking the cows, it meant that the hour of the cow had begun and it was time to milk the cattle.

New Year (*Zul* or *Jilin Ezen*)

At the present time *Zul* is reckoned to be a traditional festival for the New Year. Many older people remember another festival, however, which was called *Jilin Ezen* ('Master of the year') or *Jilin Noyon* ('Prince of the year'). According to Buddhist tradition, *Zul* is celebrated on the twenty-fifth day of the month of the cow. The festival's name, *Zul*, is derived from a custom of lighting altar lamps, which are also called *zul*. In each family altar lamps (*zul*) were made out of dough for each member of the family unit. The

father of the family carried them to the *khurul*, where he placed them on a small table for offerings. A custom has been preserved of placing two lamps in the house. One is made in the form of a small boat in which are several wicks, corresponding to the number of household members. The wick was composed of several dried-up stalks of grass, the number being the age in years of one or another member of the family plus a few extra. A second lamp was customary, and its wick was made up of nine blades of grass because the number nine was deemed to be lucky.

On the day of *Zul* a year was added to the age of all the women. Men became older just a week later, on the day of the Master of the Year (*Jilin Ezen*). In the past, *Jilin Ezen* marked the beginning of the new year, when Delkyan Tsagan Aava – the White Old Man of the Universe – was revered as the master of time, guardian, determiner of destinies and original forefather.

Tsagan Sar, the spring festival

The Kalmyks' most festive and most important festival is *Tsagan Sar*, the White Month. This name imparted a lot of meanings: a white, happy, month of greetings and of well wishing. The main content of the festival is the welcoming of spring: the beginning of the time of migrations into new pastures. It was regarded as a great sin to remain in the old place more than seven or eight days after the festival. *Tsagan Sar* began on the first day of the first spring month, the month of the dragon, and lasted for the whole month. The principal events took place on the first seven to eight days.[16]

Preparations were made in advance of the celebrations. New garments were hung up on clothes-lines, all clothes were shaken out and cattle were slaughtered in advance. Meat (beef or mutton) was cooked and celebrations were held in every home. In the process of getting ready, an important matter was the preparation of *bortsig*s. On the eve of the festival they were baked in every home so that there would be sufficient both for ritual presentations and for feeding and giving as presents to relatives on the occasions of festival visits.

An obligatory part of the preparations before the festival was the baking of various types of *bortsig*s. Resembling a sheep, the *khuts bortsig*s symbolized a situation in which there had been a large increase in this kind of livestock. Most probably these symbolic sheep were substitutes for real sacrifices that at some time had constituted part of a sacrificial ritual. An analogous role was played by the *kit bortsig*s, the shape of which was reminiscent of part of a horse's intestines, and the *övrtä tokhsh bortsig*s, which had symbolized cattle. For a herdsman, a state of having a rich increase in livestock was the most important condition of life. This symbolism was also conveyed by the *moshkmr bortsig*s, which are twisted and reminiscent of a Kalmyk meal of boiled sheep entrails, and the *khorkha bortsig*s, the name of which is translated as insects. The *jola bortsig*s portrayed a halter, which was supposed to lead in endless good fortune. A present of *shoshkhr bortsig*s

expressed a desire to live as a united family and also to have protection against enemies. The Don Kalmyks especially liked the *burkhani zala* (divine hand) *bortsig*s in the shape of a small bone, which had symbolized a lotus. *Tselveg bortsig*s in the shape of the sun were also obligatory.

Various kinds of *bortsig*s were gathered together as *deezhi*, a collection of foodstuffs that included sweets and tea too. *Deezhi* were presented to the burkhans on every festival occasion. Early in the morning on the day of the festival the rite of *zul örgkh* was performed: after stepping over the threshold of the tent, the householder sprinkled around it the first bowl of freshly boiled tea. The *tsatsal* or sprinkling was a distinctive offering to the ancestors and to the White Old Man (*Tsagan Aava*), a patron deity of all Kalmyks. Before this, the person who did this – the woman of the house – had to wash her hands and rinse out her mouth. After that a *zul* was lit and *deezhi* were placed before the burkhans. After the festival the *deezhi* were eaten by members of the family.

In the Kalmyk community of the USA, where traditions, particularly in the religious sphere, were at times preserved better than in the USSR, laymen in the mid-1960s brought to the *khurul deezhi* that consisted of butter, tea, *bortsig*s, oranges, nuts, apples and a small paper cone containing sweets.[17] The symbolism of the offering, in which the selection of foodstuffs had been diversified, nevertheless preserved the essence of the festival. Strung on to a white thread to make up a *gere belg* were one *tselveg bortsig*, one *jola*, one *moshkmr*, three *shoshkhr*, one *kit*, six *ovrte togsh* and one *khuts bortsig*.

The basic content of *Tsagan Sar* is a well wishing to relatives in accordance with a hierarchy of kinship. Even those living far away came in these days to meet their kin. Strict norms existed: the order of priority of the visits and the character of the presents depended on status. Younger people visited their elder relatives in the first days: the closer and older a relative, the sooner after the beginning of the festival one had to visit him or her. Hence on the first day a daughter-in-law with children went to her husband's mother's home for worship directed to the clan ancestors and patrons.

There was a ritualization of greeting during the festival. The one offering the greeting knelt on the right knee, raised his or her hands, palm to palm, to the forehead and pronounced a traditional greeting: the question 'Have you safely passed from winter?' The answer was, 'Yes, we have come out safely from winter.' There was also a special festival symbolism in the gestures. Those of the same age, and people of the same social rank, held out both their arms to one another, with them clasping the right hand of the one being greeted, up to the elbow on both sides. An older person proffered one hand to the younger one, who clasped it with both hands.[18]

By Buddhist tradition *Tsagan Sar* was celebrated for fifteen days, for the duration of which each day ritual ceremonies were conducted in the temples. This festival was established by Tszonkhava in 1409 in honour of the Buddha's victory over proponents of false doctrines and to mark 500 years of the 'restoration' of Buddhism's existence (which had supposedly been lost

as a consequence of accepting women into the *sangha* as nuns). The Kalmyks, in observing *Tsagan Sar*, recognized only the first motivation for the festival.

The days of *Tsagan Sar* were associated with various mythological events. It was on the first day of the dragon's month that the Buddha entered into a dispute with 'six false teachers' and carried it on for fifteen days, ending up with an outstanding victory and demonstrations of miracles. At this same time the goddess Okon Tengri returned from the land of the evil spirits and the king of the dragons, Luusun-khan, who had been inactive all winter at the bottom of the ocean, came to the surface, lifting up water from the rivers into the sky. The same days of *Tsagan Sar* have also been associated with the salvation of the world from the son of Okon Tengri, who had been born from a marriage with the ruler of the mongooses and, as the child had been transformed into a giant, in time could have wiped out the entire human race. This is the reason why, at the time of a feast in honour of *Tsagan Sar*, a sacrifice was performed to fire (to the hearth), which is perceived as a sacrifice to Okon Tengri.[19] On the eve of the festival in the temple a service dedicated to the guardian deities of the faith – the *dokshit*s – went on all night. The aim of this service was to pacify them. The main service usually took place at dawn, in the presence of a large gathering of people. A ceremonial procession proceeded out of the temple along a white strip of felt to a table on which had been set up a sacred image with a portrait of the goddess Okon Tengri. Prayers were recited, at the conclusion of which all returned to the temple to taste the consecrated food.[20]

In celebrating *Tsagan Sar*, a spirit of unity and benevolence held sway in an atmosphere of bringing people together. This is well reflected in a traditional eulogy recited in honour of *Tsagan Sar*:

> O Khairkhan, Okon Tengri, multitude of the Most High Ones!
> We propitiate the spirit of Okon Tengri;
> May people live in tranquillity and prosperity!
> All together we shall celebrate *Tsagan Sar*,
> We bow before Okon Tengri;
> Cooking hot food,
> We devote *deedzhi* to Okon Tengri;
> May food and drink be in great quantities;
> All the time we shall live in peace and prosperity,
> Without murrain and bad weather, without poverty and illness.
> We're emerging from winter with people and herds fully intact.
> Saying 'Mende!' we'll greet one another;
> Without fear and sickness we shall live!
> All the time we shall observe the laws and customs of the ancestors!
> May all you have planned come about
> According to what has been said!
> We mollify our burkhans;
> We propitiate the spirits of earth and water.

May the lamps lit in this festival
Illuminate us!
Live in prosperity:
May the Most High protectively cover you!
But we who are advanced in years, who have lived our own lives,
Shall look on your happiness,
Shall live long,
Teach the young the laws of the ancestors,
Live not displaying bad traits.
Khairkhan! We meet together on this festival day, *Tsagan Sar*,
When the ground has already thawed out after a long winter!'[21]

What is most complicated in an interpretation of this festival is its association with New Year. Under detailed analysis of the elements comprising the festival it has become clear that it is connected with the idea of the beginning of the calendar year, but at some time it was transferred from autumn to spring. It turns out that the Oirats, who had formerly at some time been a forest people, later took on nomadic cattle breeding, which had its own economic cycle: as a result, both an agricultural and a herding New Year have been preserved among the Kalmyks.

Ürüs Sar, the summer festival

The very first mention of this festival in European literature is found in writings of the thirteenth-century Venetian merchant William of Rubruck. 'On the ninth of May they gather together all the white mares of the herd and organize on that day a great festival, as they reckon that it is then that they drink the new *kumiss*.'[22] The primary meaning of this festival consisted of a celebration concerning the renewal of nature, the movement from spring to summer pastures, the augmentation of the herds, the commencement of a time of plenty and the securing of wealth and well-being. The festival, timed to coincide with the completion of the period when the livestock gave birth, was marked with great magnificence and with a large number of people coming together. So at the *Ürüs Sar* festival in 1742 about five thousand people assembled at the court of Donduk Dashi.[23] The *Ürüs Sar* was celebrated on the day of the full moon in the first summer month. This is the most beautiful time in Kalmykia: the steppe is green, the weather is already warm but it is not yet hot. With full-blown ceremonial it is celebrated from the eighth to the fifteenth days of the month. The rituals of the first seven days are delimited by Buddhist services because on these days the Buddhist temple marked, on the eighth, the Buddha's birth and 'enlightenment' and, on the fifteenth, Buddha Shakyamuni's immersion into Nirvana. The traditional part of the festival took place on the fifteenth and sixteenth of the month. On the first of these days *Ürüs Sar* was celebrated, and on the second day the sacrifice to Ova (*Ova täklgn*) took place, consisting of rituals

of sacrifice to water and earth. In honour of the *Ürüs Sar* festival there existed a special *yoräl*:

> Coming again this year the festival *Ürüs Sar*
> May it be for ever!
> May all your intentions be accomplished!
> May all your works be successful!
> Live in joy and prosperity!
> Live in happiness, know no sorrow!
> May your body be tough!
> Live in health and well-being!
> May our yards be full of livestock!
> Live in peace, serenely and happily!
> At all times enjoy yourself and laugh,
> Live without warfare, in eternal peace and tranquillity!

The festivities began at daybreak on the fifteenth day. Public prayer was directed towards Burkhan Bagshi, who was asked to pour out his favours on the livestock breeding of the *ulus*. Then the clergy, coming out of the *khurul* building, consecrated the herd of horses, sprinkling the mares with a mixture of milk and melted butter. 'On completion of this rite, which did not go on very long, the *gelüng*s, without singing or ceremonial dress, went around the *khurul*'s yurts and dispersed themselves among the homes; after that the horses were driven off to their pastures.'[24] Actually, this festival was widespread among the Kalmyks significantly earlier than the adoption of Buddhism because its Buddhist elements make up only one part of the festival.

Ürüs Sar was celebrated in every home. From first thing in the morning in each home a festive spirit prevailed and in many homes branches of birch, or of another green tree, were present. After morning prayer, all members of the household prayed at the domestic altar and then went to the general gathering of members of the community. As a rule this meeting always took place in the open air, where, after public prayer specially devoted to this occasion, for the men and boys there commenced competitions in horse-racing and Kalmyk wrestling. At the festival special attention was given to children, to whom were given special treats. This is connected with the general mood of the festival, which eulogized the fertility of nature and of man as part of nature.

11 Folk arts and epic

> The most common contemporary names of Kalmyk boys are Jangar, Khongor, Savr, Sanal and Mingiyan, the names borne by heroes of old in the favourite epic of all Kalmyks, the *Jangar*.

Kalmyk culture contains well developed and multifarious kinds of folk arts. In this chapter we acquaint the reader with the people's oral creative work, their heritage of song, folk dances and epic art, and cite typical pieces from the rich and varied Kalmyk folk arts.

Oral folklore

A significant place in the Kalmyks' everyday practice is occupied by blessings or eulogies called *yoräl*s. Having arisen in an era when the magic of words was still widespread, this genre of oral folk creative artistry has been preserved right up to the present time. The *yoräl* is an expression of a person's sincere feelings, wishing happiness, health or success to the one to whom the *yoräl* is addressed. A Kalmyk *yoräl* is always extempore and in accordance with a definite occasion: meeting a guest, presenting a gift, the birth of a child, a purchase and so on. The *yoräl* is uttered, the magic of words being reinforced by white magic, because, as a confirmation of good intentions in the wake of kind words, tea or vodka is drunk and these are associated with sacred, white foodstuffs. Despite the fact that a *yoräl* is always impromptu, it is nevertheless well known that the best extempore performance is a prepared one, that improvisation is always composed of a combination of ready-made formulae. A blessing is reckoned to be successful if one of its parts is pertinent to the concrete event at hand. As an example, in the case of moving residence to a new place what is said is roughly as follows:

> May your home be similar
> To a palace with open portals!
> At the end of your tether
> May there always stand a saddled stallion!

Within your home
May there always be abundance!

Employed here are devices of allegory and metaphor typical in Kalmyk folk traditions. When the orator speaks of the home's open doors, he implies that all members of the household are alive and well because if someone within a home is ill or has passed away then the tent's curtain would not be open in front of the doors: this in turn means that unauthorized persons are not permitted to enter. Open doors are also a sign of the prosperity of the householder, who is hospitable and esteemed by many; in other words, there are so many people who want to express their regard for him that the doors are not shut behind them. A saddled stallion indicates that there is a guest in the home – but a guest at home always means it is a special occasion. Nowadays a *yoräl* of a more universal character has become common:

Live long
In strong well-being
Neither knowing the misfortunes of war,
Nor knowing natural disasters!
May the multitudinous heavenly deities
Protect you solicitously!

Apart from the appointed blessings in everyday life, there were widely occurring ritual blessings that were used on festivals fixed according to the calendar, and were a continuation of prayers used in livestock herding. Hence at the spring festival of *Ürüs Sar* a *yoräl* of the following type was uttered:

Speedily the snow melts,
Puddles become bigger,
Sunbeams become warmer,
The green grass is swaying.
May all people on earth live
Without reasons for scandals and slanders,
In safety from theft and falsehood,
So that the number of livestock is full,
And the head count is complete,
The rams' horns are not smashed,
And the legs of the lambs do not break.[1]

The opposite of blessings were curses, *haral*s. In contrast to the blessings, curses were much less common among the general populace. If in the course of his life each Kalmyk uttered a thousand *yoräl*s, then it was far from being the case that each Kalmyk had recourse in his or her life to its antonym. Particular reasons were required to bring oneself to utter a curse. The powers of a curse were so feared among the general populace that even uttering the word *haral* was not to be taken lightly. The one who pronounced a *haral*

did so at dead of night and at the same time clapped his or her hands with the palms daubed in soot. If it were a woman who pronounced it – and the curse of a barren woman was considered to be especially severe – she had to change her usual appearance; for example, by throwing one of her braids of hair over her back, as normally both tresses of a married woman had to hang forwards. So as to make the action of the curse stronger, at times one's tongue was smeared with soot. Therefore there existed a special Buddhist prayer that was evoked to withstand the action of 'the black tongue'.[2] In the annals of Kalmyk literature there is mention of a curse that was pronounced by the Oirat khaness Yum-Agas because she was given away in marriage without observance of the obligatory customs. The khaness, clasping her hand to her breast, squeezed out milk, which shot into the air in spurts, as she uttered the words, 'May two sons be born to me who will wipe out the very name Khosheut!'

Examples of various curses are as follows:

May your way be so difficult
That your horse loses the route!
May your tongue be so muddled
That you won't be able to ask the right direction!

May your horse get stuck in the middle of the path!
May your wife die in the prime of your life!
May the grass not grow in your districts!
May you not find a physician in your time of illness!
May you lick hot stone in the search for pure water!
May you be embraced by a fickle 'rolling stone' instead of the one you love!
May your bones be dispersed on the open plains of the steppe!
May your hairs be scattered over different hills![3]

Whereas the *yoräl* is directed towards the future, another genre of popular oral creative artistry among the Kalmyks – eulogies called *magtal*s – extols the present. *Magtal*s were dedicated to representatives of the nobility, to warriors and to certain special animals such as battle horses. The earliest recorded *magtal*s are in the *Secret History*. I cite eulogies of the commanders of Chinggis Khan, who:

When the khan sent for them,
They reached the designated site,
Pulverized heaps of stone,
Seized the appointed place,
Pulled down the rocky crags,
Smashed and smote such
That white rocks were cleaved,
And bright waters gushed forth.[4]

Verses with a triplex structure are a special genre of Kalmyk culture, though they have analogies in other Eastern cultures.[5] They are similar to a blend of riddle, folk saying and proverb. It is reckoned that there are ninety-nine such triple verses.[6]

Three things are without end:
Endless the starry sky,
Endless the wisdom of man,
Endless the stupidity of man.

Three keys are there in the world:
The key of knowledge – a teacher,
The key of life – air,
The key to toil – one's mind.

Three things are splendid:
Splendid is the full moon,
Splendid is a flower of the virgin steppe,
Splendid are the exhortations of parents.

Very similar to triplex verses are ones with a fourfold structure. It is considered that either a line fell out of a fourfold verse and it was transformed into a threefold one or else the other way round, that an extra line was added to a triple verse and a fourfold one came about. Just as in the triplex verses, at the beginning a category is announced, which could be a colour, a quality or an attribute of people, the world of animals or natural phenomena:

Four things in the world are in great quantity:
Without an archery match there are many marksmen,
Without a wrestling match there are many wrestlers,
Without opponents there are many heroes,
Without a blacksmith there are many tinsmiths.

Four things are paradoxical:
One who has lived through hard torments is patient,
One who has accomplished a hard task is strong,
One who has comprehended a difficult concept has a sharp mind,
One who has paid back a great evil is a hero.

To the reader of these lines it is already understood that fine speech was one of the most esteemed qualities in society. The figure of a wise man with a golden tongue is present within the make-up of the social structure of Oirat and later of Kalmyk society in all works of national creativity produced by the Kalmyks. He is a person with a masterly command of language and can aptly make use of a proverb, saying or aphorism. It is not for nothing that one of the popular proverbs says:

The ornamentation of a person is speech;
The ornamentation of speech is a proverb.
The ornamentation of a proverb is a person.[7]

What is valued in this is not verbiage but expressiveness and terseness of speech. This is emphasized by the following sayings:

To speak a lot is importunity;
To speak a little is wisdom.

Of many words, better a little;
Of few words, better short ones.

A special place in the Kalmyks' folklore is occupied by storytelling. There were no particular persons who told stories professionally among the Kalmyks. Instead, they were passed on by word of mouth and could be narrated by both children and adults, both men and women. There did exist an unwritten rule that they should be related only when all the daily tasks had been finished off. Listeners gathered around the orators' narratives for long hours at a time. Usually from time to time the narrators addressed their audience with the question 'Aren't you sleeping?' and, on receiving a negative answer, carried on until there was no reply to a further enquiry of 'Aren't you asleep?'[8] A particular characteristic of Kalmyk tales was that they were all in prose; there was no fixed poetic form of folk tales. Investigators note four basic types of stories: tales of heroes, tales of enchantment, stories about daily life and stories about animals. Most popular were the sagas of heroes. In such tales the main hero was a warrior who exercises supernatural attributes. A typical hero in such stories devoured a whole mare at one sitting; the large bones he spat out through his mouth and the small bones he blew out through his nose. He drank seventy cups of wine in a row, each of which was carried with difficulty by seventy men; he smoked from a pipe the size of a bull's head, filled it with an armful of tobacco as big as a camel's head and got a light for it from a huge smouldering charred log the size of a horse's head. He was so strong that, when he gripped the sandalwood handle of a lash, sandalwood sap oozed through his fingers. Extraordinary qualities were also exhibited by the warrior's steed.

An important place is occupied by magical tales. Sometimes their heroes are those very same warriors and wise horses, but the heroes fall into difficult circumstances, overcome obstacles in a struggle with evil powers of society and of nature, and they are helped by a faithful horse, magical words and talking animals. At the end of the adventure the hero attains his goal and is victorious.

Tales of animals are simple in their subjects, uncomplicated in composition and not too long. Taking part in them are wolves, foxes, snow

leopards, lions, elephants, hares, rams, camels, goats, sparrows, crows, peacocks, cockerels, owls, marmots, mice, mosquitoes and so on. It goes without saying that these tales are allegorical: in the guise of animals are portrayed social types of Kalmyk society and they expose the foibles of human nature.

One of the characteristic genres of Kalmyk oral folk compositions is called *yas kemällgn* (narrations by bones). In essence it is a dialogue that is conducted around the twenty-fifth – that is, the final – vertebra of a sheep, which, as if it were an 'accident', happens to end up in the hand of those conversing. This vertebra has twelve bends on it, the significance of each of which in a poetic form is explained in the *kemällgn*. Any Kalmyk knew well each detail of this bone, because since childhood he had learned by heart the *kemällgn* from the speeches of his parents. This dialogue is performed by two people: one asks questions and the other answers them. A worthy performance of the *kemällgn* is regarded not only as a brilliant defence of a Kalmyk's own personal honour but also as a means to support the honour and dignity of the family, clan and even *ulus*.[9] A trial with this dialogue has come to be part of the testing at the time of the wedding rituals. In this way the bride's kin test the groom's relatives.

An old legend exists about how the *kemällgn* came into being. One day the khaness Dada learned that in her khanate there lived a young shepherd who could skillfully discourse on the special features of the twenty-fifth vertebra. If she were to invite him to the palace, thought the khaness, he would be frightened and shy and would not reveal his talent. After disguising herself as a commoner, the khaness came to the locality where the shepherd was living and stayed in a very poor home. The khaness cooked that part of the sheep's carcass where the twenty-fifth vertebra is located and invited the wise shepherd to dinner. The shepherd, noticing this vertebra on his plate, thoroughly cleaned the meat off it, placed a rib into the aperture and began his narrative, which has now become a national heritage.[10] The dialogue is constructed as an answer to a question, with the narrator twice changing his mind and only on the third time giving the correct exhaustive reply. As a whole, this tale is of a fictitious ideal country in which is a profusion of natural wealth. So the first tubercle of the vertebra is described as follows:

> What is this
> As a peculiar eminence?
>
> It is a mountain,
> And the higher you climb
> The more you will slide off it,
> And this mountain is still called Grey.
>
> And why, if higher,
> Will you slip further?

Ah, I made a mistake, I made a mistake,
Excuse me!
This is a mountain
Which is called Blessed, Enchanted.

And for what reasons
Is it called Blessed and Enchanted?

The reason why
It is called Blessed, and Enchanted,
Is that whoever winters on the windy slope,
Lives eternally in an abundance of meat and fat.
And the one who passes the winter
On that slope where there is no wind,
Lives forever in a profusion of dairy products –
Butter, kumiss and pale blue *ayran* [a milk-based drink].[11]

Folk music

Nowadays a most exotic type of folk music is the long drawn-out song called *ut dun*, which was widely distributed in the pre-war years. These extended songs were performed without accompaniment, and musicologists see in them free rhythmical and melodic improvisation. Not infrequently one syllable ranged over several notes and was arranged as an ornamental tune.[12] A legend exists about the appearance of the *ut dun*: allegedly the wife of a Hun khan became friendly with a wolf and the tribe that arose out of their offspring loved to sing doleful songs reminiscent of the howl of a wolf.[13]

Researchers of Kalmyk and Mongolian folk arts have noticed the existence among the Kalmyks of hymnic songs called *chastr du*, which were varieties of *ut dun*. The *chastr du* hymns are defined as songs of a spiritual content extolling the Buddha's teachings, religious personages and holy places. Hence the song entitled 'A country called Tibet' (*Zu gidg gazrn'*) is permeated by the idea of service to Jonkhava and by an appeal to go on pilgrimages to sacred places. Fragments of widespread Buddhist prayers or mantras – for example, 'May Maidari protect' or 'May the Tengri and Burkhans have mercy' – have become basic semantic phrases in many similar songs. Sometimes prayer tunes are present in these songs.[14] There exists a particular cycle of Oirat hymns. Experts on time-hallowed songs recollect that in each nomad encampment among the Kalmyks there was its own patrimonial hymn (*nutgin chastr*), in which the merits of the clan ancestor were glorified and the beauties of the native places were extolled: hence the hymn 'The light bay horse with a long mane' was a hymn of the Taltakhn clan and the song 'From the land called Altai' was a hymn of the Tugtun Shabiner clan. For example:

My light bay with a long mane
Is used to feeding on wild roots.
To the objects of religion's worship, to the lamas,
We shall hurry to bow down.
With the marvellous holy water
We are healed while performing a ceremony.
Concerning our sins and virtues
May their Highnesses the Burkhans foretell.

Extended songs were performed in particular circumstances: in honour of guests, at the time of a wedding and in solemn ceremonial moments of a festival. In the case of such a ritual the performance of the song was known as *songin du*.[15] It was sung, usually, holding in the hand a cup of *är'kä* and was begun in front of those people to whom this song was dedicated. After singing the song, the performer presented the cup and the person in whose honour the song was performed was obliged to drain the cup of *är'kä* to the bottom, and then to place a coin in the empty vessel.

Long drawn out songs were not infrequently dedicated to historical events. The exodus of 1771 and participation in military campaigns were reflected and preserved in a heritage of song. The following is sung in one of the songs called 'An undersized grey horse':

We, with noses a quarter the length of theirs, hacked up the French,
In order to ward off their attack.
We clashed swords with them not because
We wanted to join battle with them,
But we slashed for the sake of saving our life.
We crossed swords with the stumpy, swarthy French
For the sake of Russia's defence.
We defended Russia
So that peace may be established forever.[16]

Kalmyk dances

The Kalmyks' have a rich and diverse variety of folk dances. You will not confuse swift Kalmyk dances with any other. They are sharply differentiated from the dances of Mongolian peoples and from the choreography of surrounding Caucasian peoples. Kalmyks love to dance and know how to do it. Testimony to this is the variety of Kalmyk dances. Based on the musical tempo of the performance, they are subdivided into slow dances (*tovshun bi*) and quick ones (*shudrg bi*). Depending on the composition of the performers, dances are differentiated as those for individuals (*gants bi*), pairs (*hoirar bi*) and group dances. Kalmyk dances also have ethno-territorial differences. The most common classification of Kalmyk dances is given by the researcher

of folk choreography, T. Badmayeva, who differentiated: ritual (shamanic, Buddhist and wedding) dances; and non-ritual (imitative, military, work-related and social) dances. Information on shamanic dances among the Kalmyks is contained in the works of the Russian geographers and ethnographers P. S. Pallas and I. G. Georgi. These dances were performed by shamans on the night of the new moon.[17]

A basic compositional pattern of a Kalmyk dance is a circle within which movement is only from left to right. The development of 'single person' forms of folk choreography had the consequence that an isolation of each performer is retained even in group dances. During a dance they never touch one another, apart from in the invitation when they lightly touch the shoulders of the person invited to dance. The ritual of inviting to dance consists of the following procedure: the dancer approaches someone among those present and with the right hand, the elbow of which is supported from below by the left hand, lightly taps that person on the right shoulder, at the same time saying, 'I am passing the dance over to you!' (*Chamd bi ögchänäv*!).[18]

Informants from the older generation emphasize that age and sex order in folk dances were strictly adhered to in Kalmyk society. In accordance with this, dances are separated by the composition of those performing them: dances of young people (*bagchudyn bi*), men (*zalusin bi*), women (*küükd küünä bi*), middle-aged people (*medätnrin bi*) and old people (*kögshdyn bi*). A woman never performed a man's dance, and, of course, the other way round, a man never danced women's dances. People of a particular age group never performed in dances that were not in accordance with their status. Mature women's dances were distinguished from those of unmarried girls by being more graceful and staid. Dances of middle-aged and old people were performed at a gentle tempo, with slow movements and unhurried gestures. A smooth raising of the arms, to their full length, is accompanied by a hardly noticeable play of the shoulders and negligible tilts in the upper part of the body. While making these movements the performers shut their eyes, as if becoming absorbed in their memories, contemplating something secret within.[19]

There exist significant differences between the dances of different ethnoterritorial groups of Kalmyks. Hence Torguts' dances – such as *ishkmdg* and *zakhin berne* – are distinguished by their expression, fast tempo and a certain influence from the choreography of the Caucasus. It is considered that the Derbets' dances have been less subjected than others to influence from other cultures and have been preserved in a more 'pure' form. Characteristic of the Derbets' dances are calmness, restraint, concentration and a special dignity that is emphasized by a strict posture and the positioning of the head. Especially well known are the Derbet *tovshur* and *sharka-barka* dances. More characteristic of the Don Kalmyks are dances with elements of vibration. Particularly popular here are the dances called *chicherdyg* and *öskä tsogdg bi*.

Many movements in Kalmyk dances have nowadays lost their original meaning. For example, movements based on vibration in the *chicherdyg*

dance probably derive from an ancient ritual dance, in the performance of which a shuddering of the body portrayed the shaking off of evil spirits from the clothes.[20] According to a different interpretation, belonging to the venerable Kalmyk ethnographer Urubjur Erdniyev, the movement of this dance could derive from an imitation of the fluttering of birds' wings. Movements in many male dances, such as *ishkmdg*, are reminiscent of the motions of a horse-rider who, after riding for many hours, has pins and needles in his feet – and so the dancer tries to stretch his legs in different ways, touching the ground with various parts of the sole of his foot.

Many dances are accompanied by the use of *shavash*, special humorous rhymes, whose purpose is to hearten and pay tribute to the dancer. A *shavash* is recited while the dance is still being performed but nearer to its conclusion, when the dancer has already displayed his or her star performance. In olden times there was a custom of donating coins to the best dancers; these were thrown into the wooden case of a Kalmyk drum or inserted into the junction between the upper and lower trellises of a yurt, after saying a *shavash* beforehand. *Shavash*es were uttered as a recitative in the rhythm and tempo of the musical accompaniment, and a clapping of the hands accentuated the emphasis in meaning and the inner rhythm of the verse. They were composed of four or more lines in verse form, which culminated with encouraging exclamations of 'Härs! Härslä! Hädris!', meaning 'Lively! Quickly! Energetically!' The following is one of the most popular Kalmyk *shavash*es:

> Like a kite on the wing, flash past,
> As subterranean sand, creep along,
> Like a whirlwind, begin to twirl,
> Become a wall – like reeds!
> Härslä! Härslä!

Several *shavash*es, in the text of which the names of animals are mentioned, are connected with the performance of imitative dances. These are dances with an ancient origin, deriving from totemism, echoes of which are preserved in the names of small ethnic subdivisions of the Kalmyk people. The bull is reckoned to be one of these kinds of totems among the Kalmyks. A dance called *Buhin bi*, which has lasted up to the present time with elements imitating the habits of a bull, is composed of imitations of a bull's heavy gait, demonstrating his lack of agility, and portraying the fury and aggressiveness of this large angry beast. The *shavash* cited below characterizes the dance of the bull:

> Like a bull, knock him over,
> Like a camel, press him down with the knee.
> Pull his sturdy legs from underneath him.
> Squeeze him with your thick neck!
> Hädris!

Imitative dances are normally performed by men and solo. While performing the dance, the dancer tries to mimic the habits of the chosen animal. In the dance of the hare the performer folds his arms in front of his chest like a hare's paws and sucks in his cheeks to achieve a resemblance to a hare's angular snout. In the dance of the goat, the performer bounds in high leaps in all directions. In the dance of the crane, the bird's characteristic step and flapping of the wings are imitated. Especially popular is the dance of the eagle, in which, by the movements of human hands, is created the appearance of the wings of a strong, powerful bird. Military dances are an echo of the Kalmyks' military past. In them the character of a battle or fight is communicated by sounds and movements. In the military dance *Agsrdg* the performers move cautiously, their legs bent at the knee, paying attention to every sound and peering intently ahead, like warriors on a reconnaissance trip.[21]

In dances to do with work, the production processes of nomadic pastoralism are reflected: hobbling a stallion or checking the number of sheep in a flock. The rhythm of work of Kalmyk women is reflected too: milking the cows, churning butter, shaping felt, brewing tea or dressing leather and fur.

The *Jangar* epic

The *Jangariad* cycle of epic poetry is reckoned to be the pearl of Kalmyk culture and the apex of creativity of the Kalmyk nation. The total number of songs in the epic is more than thirty and they were performed to the accompaniment of folk musical instruments: the *dombra* or the *tovshur*. The *Jangar* heroic epic exists in various versions among different Mongolian peoples. Apart from the Kalmyk versions, there have been identified Altai and Buryat tales about Jangar, and also Mongolian and Xinjiang Oirat versions of the *Jangar* tales.[22]

Performers

Prior to the deportation of the Kalmyks, the epic was alive among the people and numerous Jangarchi – popular performers – sang practically professionally various songs of the epic as well as the whole cycle in its entirety. The people loved to listen to the tales about Jangar and his warriors and came from a long way away to listen to good singers, inviting them to their feasts, to weddings and to social festivals. Good performers were even more valued by the Kalmyk aristocracy, *noyon* princes and members of the gentry, in whose courts there lived permanently someone from among the bards.[23] There existed an opinion that the epic could be performed only by men and only in winter. The Jangariad was a genuine oral tradition of the Oirat Kalmyks.

The mechanism of apprenticeship as an epic performer is well described by Boris Vladimirtsov. It most commonly happened that a person who had

felt an interest and love for the *Jangar* songs began to perform separate fragments as a joke, imitating the well known and often heard mannerisms of the performer. Later, if this young person found in himself a gift and a burning desire to perform the *Jangar* heroic songs, he went to some well known singer for training. Not infrequently the singers themselves sought out a successor, sizing up the youth to see whether or not someone could be found among the young people to whom it would be possible to pass on the wonderful gift of performing the majestic tales. After starting his tuition, the young person first of all tried to familiarize himself with the subject of one or another selected song, at first practically and later theoretically. Beginning with the outline and design of the song – and the song cycle itself in general – the student laid out each song into its semantic constituents – the prologue, cardinal part and secondary episodes – and learned how to portray the beauty of a locality, of a horse or of stunning women, or to depict a fight between heroes. Having mastered this and firmly memorized the course of development of actions in the epic, the apprentice got down to a study of 'universal passages' and 'embellishments'. Anyone desiring to become a genuine singer had to master the way in which several passages in the epic are continually repeated and may be encountered in different songs; an experienced lyricist knew how, in these oft-repeated passages, to bring in different nuances, diversifying them and animating them in every possible way. Once he had learned this, he withdrew with his musical instrument to a secluded place where he tried to sing through the entire poem from beginning to end. A real bard could keep on singing one and the same heroic ballad in one night, or over three to four nights, despite all the details of the subject matter remaining just the same. Oirat bards never allowed themselves in any way to abbreviate or change the subject of the epic itself, or to cut out one or another episode; this was considered to be unworthy, and even sinful.

The art of performing by a *Jangar* maestro lay in the way he threaded together 'embellishments' and 'universal passages' like beads, at one point prolonging and dragging out various episodes, and at other points giving a more prosaic and abrupt portrayal, passing over it in a rapid and cursory manner.[24] However, it is not just that a good *Jangar* bard 'built up' the poem each time, making use of a good memory and certain acquired skills. For a performance to be successful, it was vital to have an appropriate environment, in association with which a state of inspiration was stimulated. The *Jangar* bard had to feel that he was the centre of everyone's attention, and he needed such an audience as would listen to him with keen interest. Then, in favourable conditions, it was as if the *Jangar* bard became possessed, forgot everything around him and gave over everything to his creative work. The Oirats themselves, and later the Kalmyks too, perceived their bards in the following way: they thought that in a time of ecstasy the spirits impart these forms and pictures to the singers and that these sonorous stanzas bestow on them the strength to endure these terrible exertions.

The most famous *Jangar* bards whose versions of the epic have been recorded were Eelän Ovla (1857–1920), Shavalin Dava (1884–1959) and Mukuben Basangov (1878–1944). The Soviet years in Kalmykia, with its prevailing ideology of literature – socialist in content – led to the epic, from an oral form, becoming more and more popular as a literary text. This was facilitated by the publication of twelve *Jangar* songs in 1940, in a brilliantly poetic Russian translation by a group of Kalmyk poets. Among these, the names of S. Kalyayev and Kh. Kosiyev, who had been repressed in the thirteen cruel years, only recently became widely known as authors of the Russian translation.[25] Nowadays the Russian language variant of the epic is better known than the more picturesque, accurate and satisfactory Kalmyk version:

> It was at the beginning of times
> In the ancient golden age
> Of Jangar's dawn beginning to break,
> Of Bumba's flowering starting to be conceived,
> Of the *burkhan*s' holy era.

At the present time there has begun to be a restoration of the Jangarchi's art. One of the most popular of young performers of the epic nowadays is the Jangarchi Tsagan Khaalg.

Principal figures

The *Jangar* extols in song an ideal country – Bumba, a land of happiness and abundance – about which the Jangarchi sang:

> Happiness and peace were savoured by this land
> Where winter was unknown, where forever it was spring,
> Where sweet-throated swallows and nightingales
> Lead endlessly their own circle dances.

In this fabulous country there are no old people: its inhabitants do not age after they are twenty-five years old. It is in a state of social equality in which no one divides up into 'mine' and 'yours'. *Jangar* is a heroic epic. Its main heroes are Jangar's warriors, who are united by a single idea, the idea of service to their khan. In a hero of Bumba there are no personal interests: all his objectives are directed towards furthering the sovereignty and well-being of his native land. Without exaggeration I could say that every Kalmyk from childhood knows the warriors' oath, the words of which have become the Kalmyk military's code of honour.

> We commit our lives to the point of a spear.
> We devote our passions to the sovereignty of our native realm.

Let us renounce envy, and boasting,
Concealed enmity, treachery and avarice!
We'll bare our chests and pluck out our hearts
And for the people we'll devote our lives right to the end!
Loyal to Jangar, united we'll be for ever
And on earth we shall live like one man!
Let no warrior ever fling himself back
After seeing an innumerable host of foes!
And let him not have a horse, so that he should not
Like a whirlwind take flight to the highest stockaded fort.
And may he never encounter the terrible
Force of iron, incandescent and white hot!

All versions of the epic are united in the fact that at the head of Bumba's government stands the epic ruler Jangar, to whom are ascribed the titles of *noyon* (prince, military commander), khan, *ezen* (lord, sovereign) and *bogdo* (holy one). These titles testify to the prolonged development of this personage. Jangar Bogdo is the central figure of the epic. He appears before us seated on a golden throne, surrounded by nobility, commanders and knights. All his orders are carried out unquestioningly. Jangar's external appearance is described in various ways in different songs, from a fantastically hyperbolized form to that of an almost mundane earthly khan. His epic portrait is as follows. Gazing intently at him from in front, it is as if he has the grip of a hungry lion that hurtles down from a mountain peak. Looking from the side, it is as if the full moon of the fifteenth of the lunar month is floating. Resting between his shoulders is a dense ponytail of silvery, but not lustrous, hair as thick as a fallen cypress. With difficulty his twelve wives comb it.[26] Primordial characteristics of Jangar, which relate to his heavenly origin, are connected with a mythological emperor of the birds, Garuda, and the mythological blacksmith Keke-Darkhan, as well as being closely connected with the figure of the warrior horse Zerde (with a golden chestnut colour). Though the ideal ruler at times also manifests indecisiveness, the singers saw in him a righteous and wise ruler, with his authority indisputable, his right to pre-eminence in the khanate incontestable, his personage sacred and his primacy predestined from above.

Well matched with him is a majestic palace headquarters. Beyond the bounds of this seat of his power live many millions of his subjects, pasturing multitudinous herds of his horses. Such a complete figure of a khan accords with the historical epoch of the emergence of a feudal state among the Kalmyks in the seventeenth century.

In the gallery of principal epic figures the *Jangariad* deals with twelve warriors who comprise a small inner circle around the khan. Foremost among them was Khongor the Scarlet Lion, and other prominent lights included the eldest warrior and clairvoyant Altan Tsedzhi, the expert on olden times and customs Gyuzyan Gyumbe, the irreproachable hero and

everyone's favourite in the squad Sanal, the hot-tempered and valiant Savr Tyazhelaya Ruka, the sovereign's cup-bearer, diplomat and most handsome in the universe Mingiyan, the magical marksman Khabatyn Onge-biy, the chief master of ceremonies in matters to do with the royal residence and the wit at feasts Ke-Jilgan, the stable-manager of Bumba Boro Mangna and, of course, the eternally young beautiful lady Aga Shavdal, a worthy wife of the country's ruler.

Characteristic depictions of Bumba's heroes were such that each of them united in himself attributes of a powerful warrior, in keeping with the ideal of heroic valour and physical strength belonging to the period of military democracy, and historically later attributes of epic heroes from the epoch of early feudalism.[27] To the warriors' favourite weapons, which they wielded to perfection, could be ascribed the role of distinguishing emblems. For Khongor it was the sword (*ülde*), for Savar the hatchet or pole-axe (*aibalta*), for Gyuzan Gyumbe a stabbing weapon of a sword type, for Jangar the lance (*aram*).[28] At the same time none of the hero-warriors was ever a captive of Jangar or subdued by him by force of arms, but all of them were united by a devotion to their homeland and a willingness to go to any sacrifice for the sake of peace and the well-being of the country, and on account of their chivalrous loyalty one to another.

History of study

The study and recording of the Kalmyk epic began at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a work by B. Bergman was published in German, in which, among other texts of Kalmyk literature, one of the songs of the Jangar and legends about Jangar were published. This was the first discovery of the Oirat-Kalmyk epic by the scientific world. By the end of the nineteenth century six songs of the epic were already known to scholars. In the Kalmyk language two songs came to light only in 1864. Jangar studies as a specialist branch of knowledge was continued by the Russian Orientalists A. A. Bobrovnikov, K. F. Golstunskiy, A. M. Pozdneyev, I. M. Popov and V. L. Kotvich. A large contribution to the study of the epic cycle was brought in by the Soviet scholars S. A. Kozin, B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, N. N. Poppe and G. I. Mikhailov. A galaxy of Kalmyk scholars should be mentioned, whose devoted study of the *Jangariad* cannot be overstated. In the ranks of these should be named Nomto Ochirov (one of the first Kalmyks to receive a brilliant European education), Bolyash Todayeva and Tolya Kichikov.

The *Jangar* songs continue to remain the most significant and favourite songs for the modern generation of Kalmyks throughout the nation's entire population. At the time of their exile the Kalmyks brought with them to Siberia the first (1940) edition of the epic in Russian and before battles during the Second World War Kalmyk soldiers listened to performances of *Jangar*.

12 The leader of the nation and the idea of nationhood

> In 1993 a boy was born in Ingushetia (part of the North Caucasus, next to Chechnya), who was given the name Kirsan. When he learned about this, the President of Kalmykia gave to his namesake a new Honda car.

In this chapter an attempt is made to investigate the role of a mythological layer in folk consciousness and its place in socio-political processes in Kalmykia. Consideration is also given to the sources and processes of the emergence and continuing existence of contemporary myths to do with heroes, which sometimes become vehicles for the expression of a national idea.

Of course, modern myths are distinguished from ancient ones: they are modified according to their content and channels of transmission. What is not altered, however, is the human demand for them. Moreover, basic mythological archetypes are reproduced today.

Myth, like any other text with the nature of a dialogue, is characterized by the presence of definite shared memory on the part of both the addressor and the addressee. For a myth to spring up and be sustained requires the presence of a common structure of remembrance, which on the one hand defines social moods and expectations, and on the other hand determines the pattern of behaviour of a politician wishing to attain success. Therefore a politician's room for manoeuvre is accordingly quite narrow: he does not choose the pattern of behaviour, but he has to conform to a model already existing in the consciousness of the electorate. It is as if only then the voter recognizes him. The moment of recognition, of identification of a concrete personality with an archetype that for the time being had been slumbering in popular consciousness, could also have been called the moment of birth of a myth.

We shall dwell in more detail on the archetype of a hero, to which the collective unconscious appeals, reconstituting myth about a contemporary hero-leader. A myth comes alive in the periods that are most broken and difficult for the people, when an element of mass consciousness tries to find a source of stability and reference points in the new conditions of their

historical existence, when old lifestyle models no longer work but new ones have not yet been born, and strives to explain the situation that has arisen and to find a way out of the crisis.

In the history of states with a nomadic type of economic system, the role of leader has always had a special significance. The amorphous boundaries of the area of residence, the dispersed nature of settlement in small nomadic groups, the continual external threat, the danger of natural disasters taking away a number of livestock – which is the basic wealth and source of livelihood for the people – all of these taken together in aggregate placed in jeopardy the very question of people's survival. Therefore, on the leader, in the nomad's consciousness, were laid functions significantly wider than among the rulers of settled peoples: he represented not merely a manager sent from a higher authority, but first of all a hero who 'providentially' – by the will of the gods – was personally responsible for the happiness and welfare of his people, and for the future of the ethnic group. Typologically, the leader was identified with a mythological one, and later with an epic hero, and was compared with him in the consciousness of the people. It is indicative that in Mongolian epics an epic hero is turned from one who struggles with mythological powers to become the ruler of an ideal state.[1] There has taken place some kind of contamination of the attributes and features of a mythological personality with those of a real historical individual.

How is a hero represented in the collective consciousness of Kalmyks? What do their notions of a hero lean on? From what sources are they fed? It would not be a great exaggeration to say that he is represented most fully and clearly in a general form in the *Jangar* epic cycle.

The ruler of the ideal epic country of Bumba was simultaneously a military commander, the guardian of peace and a guarantor of the prosperity of his nation. He had a rich genealogy and was the most distinguished among all his comrades-in-arms. Jangar possessed miraculous abilities because he was equal to the gods. Apart from that, the hero (*batyr*) possessed the gift of a seer, which allowed him to see the future and peep into what tomorrow might hold for his subjects. The wisdom of a statesman and skill in diplomacy were also indispensable characteristics of a hero.

One of the fundamental qualities of a traditional leader was heroism; all his life was dedicated to a titanic struggle with opponents, directed towards the defence of a peaceable life for his people. Outwardly, the khan is distinguished from his subjects not only by physical strength but also by physical beauty. The birth of Jangar was not accidental: he had a special destiny to become the sovereign of his world.

An epic hero had to possess not only stability and strength of spirit, but also power of endurance in privations. The *batyr*, despite his royal origins, had to be modest and unpretentious: to sleep on the bare ground and endure thirst; at times of necessity 'for food he was content with dew'. In his wrath he was terrifying. We can add to this that Jangar was possessed of magical powers and knowledge. He could call forth the rain and wind, and could not only heal but even restore slain warriors to life.

Jangar's age was characteristic. He was born in a country where one ceases to grow older after the age of twenty-five. At the age of two he was sitting on a horse; at the age of three he 'broke down the city gates' and took three fortresses; when four years old he captured four strongholds. By the time he was seven years old he had become khan. Consequently one should note that a young hero is quite a frequent character in Kalmyk epics: his actions startle by their exertions and their inconsistency with the person's age.

A leading role is also accorded to Jangar, the chief hero of this epic poem, who is brought into the course of events at the most difficult, critical moment; he continually directs the actions of his heroes and fulfils the function of a keeper of his country's peace and well-being.[2] Here it is worth noting that defending the country of Bumba – a blessed mythological land of eternal youth and prosperity – is a fundamental idea of the *Jangar* epic, and the country of Bumba itself lives in popular consciousness not only as a country of the past, like a 'golden age' in the history of the Oirat nation, but also as a land of the people's aspirations and expectations, a land of the future. Relying on the opinion of researchers of the Kalmyk epic, it is possible to confirm that its main hero is the bearer of the form of an ideal chief, a hero, who throughout centuries lived on in the consciousness of the Oirat-Kalmyks and against whom they seem to measure their historically real leaders.

A further source that feeds present-day myths of a hero-leader, and that is impossible to avoid, is provided by a real-life historical model, namely the person of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, who for many centuries has lived on in folk memory, exerting right up to this day an influence on folk concepts of leadership. Definition as a charismatic personage is most apt for this hero in history: as shown by T. Skrynnikova, in the Mongolian culture of the Middle Ages this was expressed by the term *sul'de*.[3] In the biography, behaviour and deeds of Chinggis Khan it is possible to find a considerable number of typological traits similar to those of Jangar. Actually, it is here that it becomes difficult to differentiate historical events from legends.

We shall briefly recall some basic landmarks in the life of the founder of the Mongolian state that are relevant in the context of our investigation. The future khan was born gripping in his hands a clot of blood: this was taken as a special demarcation of the first-born. After the demise of his father, his mother was left alone with four children; they had to endure various evils, and to hide Temuchin, as the future khan was named, away from their clan's enemies. Faithful friends and skill in finding comrades helped Temuchin at the age of twenty-eight to be acknowledged as khan at the *kurultai* (assembly), after he was lifted up on a white piece of felt. Chinggis Khan could unite all the Mongolian tribes into one state, after making many other peoples subject to him. Although Chinggis Khan himself was never on Kalmyk territory, according to a folk legend one of his headquarters at one time was located within the contemporary boundaries of the republic.

Attributes of Chinggis Khan affected by traits of the epic hero are those depicting him as a wise, brave ruler who is capable of bringing prosperity to

his land. In our view these also affect models current among the general public today. Certainly those features of the ruler that have been retained most clearly in the popular memory are those that directly correlate with this model that we have attempted to analyse above.

It is by no means a coincidence that a popular perception about the lineages of the most distinguished rulers is that they are descended (in reality or imagination) from Chinggis Khan. In this way mass consciousness explains the dimensions of these personalities. On the other hand, these rulers themselves did what they could to foster this reputation of being descendants of Chinggis Khan.

A glorious period in the history of the Kalmyk nation was the reign of Ayuka Khan. Ayuka's childhood was spent with his maternal grandfather, Erdin Khun-taiji, under whose guidance was stimulated Ayuka's aspiration to leadership over the steppe peoples; this was reinforced by the tutelage of his own clan grandfather, Shukur-Daichin. Many Kalmyk literary memorials have preserved lessons taught to his grandson by Shukur-Daichin. Guided by the advice of his grandfather, the cunning and brave Ayuka, who loved military skirmishes, by the age of thirty had already become khan and a determined advocate of personal power.

'Right from the first day fate smiled on Ayuka, who, thanks to the art of politics, succeeded in concentrating power in his hands and firmly leading the Kalmyks for the next fifty-four years and spreading his influence to all the neighbouring Turkic tribes.'[4] His Holiness the Dalai Lama bestowed on Ayuka the title (*Khan Tsolo*) and seal (*tamga*) of khan. 'From this time on, among the Kalmyk feudal lords, was established the view that only someone who had been blessed by the mouth or the hands of the Dalai Lama could be regarded as a genuine khan.'[5]

Of course there were quite a few prominent public and political leaders in the history of the Kalmyks. However, it is as if many names in history are displaced on to a second level. After the tragedy of 1771 the Kalmyk khanate on the Volga lost its status. The Kalmyks, fragmented into *ulus* and clan groups, from then on never had a sovereign for the entire nation and those who were in charge of the Kalmyks in the following years did not have influence on a nationwide level.

The twentieth century brought much that was new to the Kalmyks' way of life and ways of thinking. Soviet power inculcated a new type of leader and of national hero. Despite the communist ideology's system of values being principally alien, the image of a national leader in its basic outlines reproduced the matrices of the archetype. The name of General B. B. Gorodovikov, who was in charge of the republic from 1961 to 1980, and was the first secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, became in these years a symbol of the Kalmyk nation.

This is how his role in the Kalmyks' life today is evaluated as far as the general public is aware: 'At the time of our greatest hardship – in the years of restoration and development of the republic after Stalin's genocide and a

destructive war – it pleased Fate that from among the Kalmyks emerged such an authoritative and wise leader.'[6] The public duties of Gorodovikov stood indubitably higher in popular estimation than the activities of all successive first secretaries of the Kalmyk Regional Committee of the Party. As People's Writer A. Balakayev wrote, 'But for Basan Bad'minovich with us, I'm more certain than ever that we'd have lagged behind other ethnic groups in economic and cultural development. Once and for all we must remember and realize that Basan Bad'minovich Gorodovikov raised up the lifestyle and life, the honour and the worthiness, of our republic and of our people to an unprecedented height and peak.'[7] Such evaluations, moreover, were written at a time when, it could be said, a negative attitude to party leaders had become commonplace.

The end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, as in all republics of the former Soviet Union and Russia, were difficult for the inhabitants of Kalmykia. The failure of the political system, which had become obsolete, the deep fissure in the social structure and the discrediting of the old ideology, which coincided with an economic crisis, evoked in Kalmyk society a feeling of being at a turning-point. On the one hand, people were confused and worried, against a background of a continuing governmental crisis within the republic, but on the other hand they had a subconscious sense that the unfolding political situation harboured within itself new prospects for national rebirth within the framework of a sovereign Kalmyk Republic and of free development on the basis of market relations.

Furthermore, in 1990 the Republic celebrated the 550th anniversary of the composition of the *Jangar* epic as a complete epic cycle: the imaginations of very many Kalmyks have been seized by its basic themes and ideas, namely a dream of a land of prosperity called Bumba and of heroes who enable the people to flourish, who protect them and who show them the right way. We might add that for the first time in many decades a large delegation of diaspora Kalmyks came to the celebration of the *Jangariad* – those who had been living in the USA, France and Germany. It is as if conversations about how they live, and even the very sight of them, inspired confidence: 'we too could live like that, just given a chance'. People saw in the person of Kirsan Ilyumzhinov an embodiment of such an opportunity. 'If among the general public – and that means each one of us – there should now appear a chance to stand on our own feet, let's make the most of it. Frankly speaking, it's worth it. There might not be another chance. This is the chance – Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.'[8]

Now, however, just as had been the case in 1993, many are being confronted with the questions of how a young businessman could succeed in winning the presidential elections, why people had gone particularly for him and what had played a decisive role in the people's choice. In our view, one of the basic reasons for Ilyumzhinov's indubitable victory was the way in which his image corresponded with the archetype, which had taken root in popular ways of thinking, concerning the nature of a hero-leader. He could

not fail to win because he was the only candidate – and perhaps also, more broadly, the sole political activist – who was almost completely identified with the image described above: he not only conformed to social expectations but he also satisfied them. To put it bluntly, people recognized in him that which they had felt inside themselves would turn up. Just a couple of citations will be quoted by way of illustration:

> The days we live in at present are the time of Kirsan Ilyumzhinov; therefore he has become close and understood to all of us, and has comprehended our worries and our expectation.[9]
>
> We are sure that God himself has sent him to us after many years of privation and suffering that had fallen to the lot of our nation. It is to his very name that we attach confidence for tomorrow, and we entrust to him our future and our children.[10]

How are the actual facts of the biography, behaviour and attributes of Ilyumzhinov reflected in mass consciousness and in what form are they assimilated to it?

Within an ordinary family there grew up an exemplary boy, an activist who at the age of fourteen was the Republic's chess champion and who read copiously. Once he had graduated from Elista's School Number Three, he worked as a metalworker and fitter at the Odn factory, then did his military service in the North Caucasus military division. From 1982 to 1989 he studied at the Moscow State University of International Relations, where he specialized in the study of the Japanese language and in the politics and history of Japan. From 1990 Kirsan was manager of the Soviet-Japanese firm Liko-Raduga, and almost immediately after this he became president of San International Corporation. In 1990 he was elected from the Manych territorial district as a People's Deputy of Russia, and in 1991 (until the collapse of the Soviet Union) he was a member of the Supreme Council of the USSR. From 1993 he was President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce. A gold 'medal of peace' was conferred on him in 1992 for his humanitarian activities. At present he is on the board of more than fifty companies, banks and stock exchanges on the territory of Russia and about twenty or so other countries.[11] At a time of crisis of authority in Kalmykia, when the homeland found itself in difficult conditions, he put his own name forward as a candidate for the presidential elections, and won.

Why was it in this particular biography, and not in the life histories of other candidates for the post of President, that the electorate 'recognized' the 'Saviour of the nation sent by God'? We shall attempt to unpack the reasons why this should be.

First, the biography cited above is usual only at first glance. Even if one were to discard the idea that mythological consciousness often imparts a mystical import to the most commonplace things, the fact that someone

emerging from an average Kalmyk family managed to be admitted into, and to graduate from, one of the most elite universities of the land, and, more than that, become one of the first legal millionaires, could make an impression on even the most rationally minded person. So why not speak of a mythological consciousness? Second, a mythological way of thinking does not assimilate facts of reality through their analysis. Instead, it performs a selection in favour of a mystical link between invisible ('providential') powers and visible ones; in this case, an attainment in life, hitherto unprecedented in Kalmykia, which, moreover, is unprecedented in so far as the very understanding of 'millionaire' was completely new, being not in Russian or 'Soviet' terms but a Western conception of this mode of behaviour. As the raw material directly available to mystical logic is an elemental-intuitive apperception, it permits a process of generalization to reach an outcome without losing touch with what is concrete. Hence it is not difficult to understand why it should be that the figure of a young millionaire became an object of the projection of mythological consciousness. So why were Ilyumzhinov and many other contemporary Russian politicians self-nominated to leadership positions? Characteristic of the psychology of these people is the impartation of a powerful layer of magical thinking, appearing to the bearer as traditional political culture but making it congruent to the psychology of the popular masses.[12]

It was impossible for such an unusual or, it could even be said, extraordinary figure on the Kalmyk horizon not to be invested with mythological power, the subject of these projections himself serving as a source of such power. A mystical, 'providential' and charismatic meaning is imparted to the chosen object in accordance with a certain kind of mythological logic. Within myth is its own alogical (rather than illogical) expediency, which A. F. Losev calls a 'miracle' and elucidates in the following manner: 'A random conjunction of the empirical flow of a person's life story with its ideal purpose is also a miracle.'[13]

In the light of the interpretation given above of the biography already known to us, let us now look at it from the point of view of mythological consciousness. As we have seen, objectively the figure of Ilyumzhinov could not fail to become an object of mythological explanation by force of his unusualness in the Kalmyk political landscape. Having become such, he is invested with mythological attributes, his personality is identified with that expected of a hero-leader and this coincidence – the correlation between a concrete personality and his ideal purpose – is perceived as a miracle. Here, in the moment of 'recognition', is also a point of departure for a student of myth to see the formation of legends that themselves have a mythological form. Any fact of a biography is now perceived as if it were miraculous, having a 'providential' import, and any character trait is endowed with a mythological interpretation.

Let us now examine the president's biography in the interpretative framework of mythological consciousness. In an ordinary Kalmyk family

an extraordinary boy was born. His birth foretold a future that would be out of the ordinary. It is said that the Mongolians have investigated the family tree of Ilyumzhinov and elucidated that his ancestral stock through both the male (*tyayachud*) and female (*shar merkid*) lines are derived from the family tree of Chinggis Khan. As a sign that the President of Kalmykia is, as it were, the political leader of the contemporary Mongolian-speaking world, a delegation from Mongolia presented him with a sword similar to the sword of Chinggis Khan. It was shown above that a connection with the genealogy of Chinggis Khan is perceived in popular thinking as an indispensable element in the legitimation of power. On the other hand, the president's grandfather, also named Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, was a hero of the civil war about whom even today the people preserve lucid memories of a person who had given his life for the common good, and who had stood at the origins of the new Kalmykia. In one of the novels written at the time of the civil war by the émigré writer Sandzhi Balykov, the death of the president's grandfather is described as suicide, expressing disappointment in Soviet power, which had been guilty of the destruction of thousands of Kalmyks.[14] The reputation of this brave and honourable person is likewise perceived as of material significance for the future president. This is especially the case in so far as, according to the magic of names in traditional popular concepts, the destiny of someone who had been given a certain name should, as it were, repeat in large part the fate of the ancestor in whose honour the person had been named.

Among the future president's contemporaries, what had singled him out was that he was reckoned to be a 'good guy' with 'street cred'. At school the president-to-be studied excellently, was socially active and also read a lot. But here is just the kind of fact that is picked out by mythological thinking: while still a lad he had read through all of Lenin's works, the fifty-five volume collection of writings that his mother obtained at his request. (Chinggis Khan's mother exerted a great influence on his formative years too.) Kirsan Ilyumzhinov played chess a great deal, and at the age of fourteen became the republic's chess champion. He was always distinguished by his good manners, was never rude to anyone and never offended anyone.

From childhood the lad was allured by the distant land of Japan and a cherished dream of his was to become a Japanologist. However, the path to its realization was not a simple one. After finishing school he went to work as a metalworker at the Odn factory and then did his military service. While in the army he had already set himself the goal of being admitted into the Japanese department at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations. For the sake of this goal he got admitted into the Communist Party but at night in the barracks he learned English.

In his college years he was also an assiduous student. Here is but one fact, which in accordance with the laws of mythological thought decisively explains everything: Kirsan was such a bright student that one of the Japanese language teachers gave him, her favourite pupil, an exceptionally rare ancient

Chinese chess set for which Moscow antiquarian dealers were prepared to pay an astronomical sum. This is how myth treats the sweep of the future president's personal charisma when he was still in his student years: 'Being about my work at the Moscow State University', writes the author of a letter to the newspaper *Izvestiya Kalmykii* in support of Ilyumzhinov's candidature, 'a number of times I heard of a talented young man from Kalmykia who was showing great promise. Not infrequently I happened to be in a situation when I unexpectedly became the centre of attention only because I was from Elista, because I was from the same homeland as Kirsan.'[15]

However, an unusually bold and vivid figure is not to everyone's taste, and he suffered from his not wanting to be 'like everyone else', which is also generally perceived as a kind of marking out by fate. In his fourth year at university, Ilyumzhinov was unjustly accused (it is said, on eighteen counts), expelled from the institute and, allegedly, even imprisoned for several days. He was helped to get out of this difficult situation by the intervention of David Kugul'tinov, the national poet of Kalmykia, and at that time a People's Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The intrigues of those who sought Ilyumzhinov's demise miscarried and righteousness triumphed: he was reinstated at the university. He continued to work on himself a lot and learned several languages: there is a current idea that he knows several Oriental languages, besides Japanese.

On finishing his higher education, he became a director of the Russo-Japanese firm Liko-Raduga. His success in this field is reflected briefly in the following anecdote: apart from his salary, Kirsan received supplements on twelve points, in that he does not smoke, argues with no one and was never late etc. As we shall see, a manager's actual activity is not of interest to mythological thought.

Later, once he had founded his own San corporation, Ilyumzhinov became a millionaire. This later period in the life of the future president, as has been noted, evokes the most interest. His swift enrichment has been the focus of much attention and a plethora of conjectures attempting to explain it. But for mythological ways of thinking, as we have seen, explanation is not the main issue: it is the fact itself that is important. The fact of a quick gaining of wealth is written into the figure of someone whose unusual fate has been preordained from above; by virtue of a peculiarity of mythological consciousness this fact is ascribed a miraculous quality. The question 'How?' (for example, with the help of a great deal of work, effort, competence, entrepreneurial skill, risk and much, much else, thanks to which a person can gain success in business) is not of interest – it is as if all this is beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. But this too is not important. Something else is important: if a hero knows how to enrich himself, it means that he knows how to make the country rich too. 'For all needs there are resources: for culture, the economy, hospitals, pensioners,' wrote the cinema dramatist Oleg Mandzhiyev, 'and Kirsan Ilyumzhinov knows where to take them from and how to earn them: I'm convinced of this.'[16]

It is indicative that opponents of the future president also, for other purposes, tried to interpret the fact of Ilyumzhinov's rapid accumulation of wealth. But they too remained within the bounds of mythologizing, limiting their versions of the derivation of Kirsan's millions to such well known clichés as the money of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the money of a mythical drug mafia, finances from some kind of mafia from the Caucasus region or deals with fake documents. (Naturally, myth does not demand evidence and reasoning.)

Everything that has been enumerated is but fragments, details in the life of an unusual person whose principal destiny is to save his people, to bring them out of crisis and lead them into prosperity. It is as if these separate fragments confirm the higher destiny of the hero, raised by Providence itself to the apex of fame and success, who in a difficult time for the republic sacrifices his own interests (life in the capital, a high income and working for himself) and returns to his native lands in order to lead the Kalmyks out on a fortunate path, making the republic into the land of Bumba. 'If Ilyumzhinov doesn't become president then we'll lose everything, but he'll lose nothing at all.'[17] 'His rise to power is not a path to a rest house but an ascent up a volcano.'[18] Or, further: 'Of course it would have been possible to elect as a president merely a good man [here Kirsan is not simply a good man – he is an out of the ordinary person] had the republic's economy been functioning like clockwork and if the level of people's livelihood were sufficiently high . . . But actually there's none of that and everything has to be created, lifted up and put right. In such a period we desperately needed such a man as K. Ilyumzhinov.'[19] It is scarcely necessary to add commentary to the adduced citations. Without exaggeration one could say that in them it is as if in a few lines is portrayed the role of a culture hero known to us from classical mythology.

What in all likelihood are most clear in all this, however, are notions of a new hero-saviour predestined by Fate to become a benefactor of the nation that are expressed in *yoräls* and poetry that appeared at the time of the pre-election campaign:

> A gracious emissary sent by God,
> A worthy grandson from our sons,
> Today you are not only elected,
> You are the hope of all Kalmykia![20]
>
> Kirsan becomes President,
> And then in Kalmykia
> The wanderings and deprivations
> Will be forgotten for ever more.[21]

In these works the mythological form comes to its logical conclusion. It is as if the circle is closed: dispensing with the ancient prototypes imprinted

within folk poetic creativity, mythological modes of thinking reinterpret them and create on their basis, and also in accordance with them, new mythological forms – and finally take on the shape of those same traditional poetic forms.

Hence an image of the president is formed by mythological thinking that goes back to the archetype of a hero examined above. Kirsan Ilyumzhinov is primordially endowed by Fate with miraculous attributes; he is an out of the ordinary person, with a calling by Providence itself to lead out the people at a difficult period in their history on to a new path of development, to prosperity and well-being, to transform Kalmykia from an appendage for raw materials into a highly developed region – a 'Kalmyk Kuwait' – and to accomplish in Kalmykia an economic miracle similar to that of Japan. A great future has been determined by the very provenance of the contemporary hero whose lineage derives from Chinggis Khan. It is also predicted by well known soothsayers. Meetings between Kirsan Ilyumzhinov and 'Granny Vanga', who had predicted that he would 'ascend three rungs of the ladder', drew a wide resonance in the republic. Among the populace it is said that he regularly resorts to the help of psychics and astrologers. On the other hand, the president himself also exercises an indubitable gift of clairvoyance. This ability of his to see into the future (which from the point of view of rational logic is a result of his professionalism, informedness, analytical powers and political intuition) is perceived as a mystical quality of an out of the ordinary personality.

The contemporary hero, like his typological predecessors, is a valiant person. Today this bravery is primarily a political one. Much of what had been done by him in the political sphere was done in Russia for the first time: the dissolution of the soviets, a legislative assignment of private property, the adoption of international standards in commerce, the adoption of the 'Code of the Steppe' in place of the standard constitutions existing in all constituent regions of the Federation, and so on.

Yet another characteristic trait of the classical Kalmyk epic hero was his young age. Youth not only did not hinder Ilyumzhinov from getting the people's sympathy, it actually helped him, as in traditional thinking it was perceived not as a shortcoming but as a virtue. Youthfulness embodies energy, strength, courage and prospects for development. It was this that the electorate saw in Ilyumzhinov. In such a context the understanding of 'young' is by no means synonymous with the connotations of 'green' (meaning 'inexperienced') in Russian or colloquial English; on the contrary, for the Kalmyks it conveyed a completely different semantic load – that is, pride, admiration and a sense of power and potential – extrapolated on to the destiny of the nation.

In the present context it is not surprising that youthfulness is not associated with inexperience. A young hero is, as it were, from the outset imbued with political and statesmanlike wisdom and with diplomatic skill. It is like a talent that is not acquired with age but is given to a person from birth.

Wisdom in governing is also directly associated, in popular consciousness, with his skill in diplomacy and ability to implement a policy with neighbours that is favourable to his own nation. A priority in this arena for the Kalmyks over the past three centuries has been a strategy of good-neighbourliness. In this it is possible to delineate two basic directions: relationships with the rulers of Russia and relationships with other neighbouring ethnic groups. We are reminded of the fundamental attitudes of Ayuka khan – who may well be the most esteemed Kalmyk khan – towards Peter the First, one of the outstanding pages in the history of Kalmykia. Ayuka khan's words – 'Our arrows and our swords will always be for the defence of Russia's interests' – have become a distinctive precept for his descendants. Ilyumzhinov expressed this attitude to Russia straightaway in his pre-electoral programme, saying, 'I am a Kalmyk and at the same time I am a Russian. It is inseparable – like a heart . . . The wise testament of Ayuka khan and Peter the Great concerning the close union of the two nations is the unforgettable foundation to the philosophy behind our actions and our inseparable relations with Russia. I propose to construct in Elista a monument portraying the moment of the meeting between the two rulers, as a testimony to the Kalmyks' feats of arms as defenders of the fatherland's frontiers, as a symbol of the unity and friendship of the Kalmyk and Russian peoples.'[22] As for the regional role of Kalmykia, in this too is observed a definite historical continuity: to be a stabilizing factor in the south of Russia.

For popular consciousness it is very important that an authentic leader has recognition not only domestically but also among close neighbours. It is obligatory to present the international recognition of 'our' leader in the world. How important this is for the formation of an image of the leader is shown by the electorate's continual interest in this topic at the time of the pre-election campaign. Ilyumzhinov is known and appreciated in international financial circles; his name alone can attract investors to the republic and for his sake foreign businessmen and film stars travel to Elista. In his capacity as President of the Kalmyk Republic, Ilyumzhinov's meetings with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Pope, his trips abroad and his meetings with foreign political leaders have embellished with crucial details the image of a leader already created by popular consciousness. It is not accidental that photographs of the president with the Dalai Lama and the Pope can be seen in many homes. In them there is a concrete and emotional confirmation: on an equal footing with the world's most eminent political figures is our president (and, together with him, so are we too). What is important here, as expressed by R. Hamayon, is the psychological effect of people's identification with their president at the level of associating with some kind of system of values.[23]

What was also natural for the Kalmyks' traditional political culture was the idea of autocracy. Whereas in the history of many other nations a temporal leader was sometimes in competition with the head of the ecclesiastical

community (or else in the system of power structures a consultative or representative organ is proposed), the political system of the Kalmyk khanate, or of the epic land of Bumba, was completely subordinated to one person, the khan. However, in conditions of an abrupt cleavage in socio-economic relations a rather strongly authoritarian power can facilitate the stability of society. What is more, the people were fed up with the impersonal bureaucratic government of the party nomenklatura and, later, the confrontation between the two branches of power (legislative and executive); they were more impressed by a type of authority with a deeply personal character. Prior to the second elections a group of the president's supporters had prepared calendars with large photographs of Ilyumzhinov in the attire of a khan: expensive white ceremonial garments decorated with fur and adorned with embroidery in gold.

Moods of autocracy have found a reflection in the press, which has reminded the republic's inhabitants of the old Mongolian fable of two snakes that had been crossing a road ahead of a bullock-cart. The first had seven heads and one tail. The heads began to argue over whether to stay on the verge or cross over, but while they were deciding the snake was crushed by a wheel. The second snake had one head and seven tails, and without any arguments took the decision to cross the road; all seven tails, having accepted the order, quickly transported the snake across to the other side.[24] Therefore popular thinking is impressed by a style of leadership aided by businesslike, concise, direct and open instructions. Insubordination, ineptness, sluggishness or treachery had to be punished without fail. Autocracy also had to presuppose a clear understanding of one's own place by everyone working in the president's team. The threat of a prompt dismissal hangs over any expression of personal opinion or of an individual viewpoint not completely identical with the official one.

A hero receives power not by inheritance but by being the most clever and rich. Wealth, in folk conceptions, had to become a token of honesty – that is, of incorruptible power. 'Kirsan Ilyumzhinov knows his own business, knows how to persuade, and, principally, knows how to make money.'[25] Many residents were amazed at the willingness of a rich person, who had absolutely no need of anything, voluntarily to take on the weight of the Kalmyk 'crown'. 'Were I to meet Ilyumzhinov, I would advise him, "What do you want the presidency for? You've got everything to provide for your family to the seventh generation with wealth and well-being; help those close to you – and that's everything. Concern yourself with yourself; swim in dollars."'[26]

In the President of Kalmykia's style of governing it is possible to notice other features – characteristics of leadership – that are commonly found in many cultures. First, there is a truncation in any appearance of vital energy. A soft voice, taciturnity and hard-to-detect gestures were characteristic of many rulers in various epochs: both of Tsarist behaviour and, at a considerably later time, of the figure of Stalin.[27] The incredibly intense work routine

of the latter – who would stay up working until morning – is often seen in Kalmykia's Government House (or, as it is called in Elista, by analogy with the Russian one, 'The White House'). On days when the President of Kalmykia is in Elista his reception room is full of people who, for the sake of an audience with Ilyumzhinov at any time, are prepared to wait all night for this meeting. Many inhabitants of Elista walking or driving past the town's main square and paying attention to the lit up windows of the presidential office with satisfaction remark that 'Kirsan is working'. Not infrequently the observance of various taboos – dietary, sexual and so on – was imposed on a traditional leader. In the absence of direct information, it is possible to note that Kirsan Ilyumzhinov has an asthenic physique and his leanness, to some extent appearing sickly, does not allow the president to be suspected of excessive gluttony. Being a married man, the president appeared in public with his wife only at the ceremony of his first inauguration, after which he appeared by himself at all official and unofficial functions.

In our view, any ignoring of the above-cited texts (citations from letters to newspapers) – which also have, as it were, lying at their base a mythological layer of thinking – does not allow the portrayal of a complete picture of the ethno-political processes that have taken place. For its part, a description of a mythological layer of thought would be incomplete if we did not also touch on the attempts to create 'myths of inversion': almost mirror-image repetitions of the above-quoted mythological texts, but with a reversed polarity.

Beginning in 1994–5, there have been attempts in Kalmykia to create an organized political opposition that tirelessly seeks to expose the president as sinning in some way or other. However, for those who would really investigate the president's failings and mistakes, the majority of texts that have been created by the president's opponents reveal nothing at all. Their authors largely remain within the framework of that same mythological space. Intuitively tilling the soil known to us, but facing in the other direction, those advocating these viewpoints simply reverse the polarity.

Nevertheless, it would not be right to avoid paying attention to the anti-myth. It is as if it supplements the characteristic of the layer of thinking that is investigated in the present work. Without it, it might be that the meta-text itself would also be incomplete. It is as if everyday problems and difficulties (which objectively have been caused by the economic situation that has developed in Russia) and personal insults had to provoke an image in people's consciousness that is now the opposite to that already described above. However, this projected image, by virtue of its artificial source, looks rather pallid, lacking in brightness or fantasy, and for the 'man in the street' leaves a bitter taste in the mouth by abounding in generalities and labels still known from the communist period, but which in recent times have become, to put it bluntly, banal throughout the whole expanse of the post-Soviet landscape: 'The untwisting spiral of dictatorship, bureaucracy and corruption', 'Kalmykia is steeped in mendacious, hypocritical and absolutely incompetent authorities', 'Boundless Bacchanalia in the economy' and so forth.

One way in which an antagonistic myth can be formed is along the lines of 'A young con-man, who was luring the ingenuous ordinary inhabitants of the Republic with colourful promises, came to power . . .' In fact, the president's seat was vital to Ilyumzhinov, in order to use the right of immunity to get out of criminal responsibility concerning 'the crude oil affair', as well as in connection with vanished credits for the purchase of Kalmyk wool. On his accession to power, he gathered around himself relatives and friends among whom he distributed the most important government posts. 'In order to get a portfolio, one had to denounce somebody, and to create . . . a negative opinion about someone.'[28]

The president's official public duties are perceived in the following manner: 'revelations in the Moscow press, a chess sensation and flying visits to the Arabs and to Saddam Hussein', and 'for a year (of work in the White House) I was amazed that here are foremen, dancers, mass entertainers, mechanical engineers etc. – but where are the managers? Oh, there are none of those!'[29] Apart from this, in the Government House 'there is no end to petty intrigues, plots, betrayal of confidences, shadowing of people, fighting for political posts and chicanery'.[30] The adoption of the Code of the Steppe was perceived by opponents as nothing less than 'a direct betrayal of that for which our fathers, grandfathers and ancestors had fought and had at last managed to obtain'.[31]

At the same time the secret of wise management of the affairs of state is very simple: 'you merely have to weigh up what is to everyone's taste, so that it does not look ludicrous'. Whereas a myth's hero is respected and accepted throughout all the world, the hero of an anti-myth has held up the whole republic as an object of ridicule by the whole world, and is respected and taken seriously by no one. For the president's opponents, all evil is personified in him; the hero becomes an anti-hero, the creator becomes a destroyer and the pride of Kalmykia becomes its disgrace. 'Everything that's happened is shameful. This image which our president creates is embarrassing. A shame on those incredible things which would be somewhat offensive for a normal person to speak about in decent society.' 'A year and a half has passed . . . There has neither been nor is any rapid flourishing of the republic, but we see a decline in the economy, unemployment and a complete pauperization of the people.' 'Instead of the promised "Kuwait" we've ended up in a "cuvette" – down the drain!'[32] It is true that Kuwait 'in principle was a possible, but vital, economic mechanism, which would have allowed all specialists to be drawn in'.[33] Put in a nutshell, there remained but one step to the land of Bumba, but they did not elect that hero (and in fact beneath his mask was hidden an enemy of the Kalmyks), and now it follows that they should elect a genuine hero.

Sometimes even the president's commonplace and frankly metaphorical pronouncements, or use of devices that are quite common in public speeches, are interpreted absolutely literally by his opponents, yet again on account of the way in which it is just those kinds of arguments that are better grasped by the audience.

The opposition tries to make use of the mythology that has already been developed, simply turning the hero of the existing myth into an anti-hero, and introducing a new actor in the place of 'the liberated'. 'We have but one way out: to bring into politics honest people with clean hands and intentions, not allowing them to go astray. But for that we have to learn to discern not with the mind, but with the heart and soul.'[34] Moreover, it is not only respectable and highly educated people who should govern the republic. It should also be those 'who have slept in a cart on their native steppe, a sheepskin coat for a covering, not turning up their nose at the smell of dung'.[35] What is more, there are such candidates already: 'A paradigm of honesty and decency, an emblem of the eternal struggle for equity, a symbol of adherence to principles: all this in one person.'[36] Opponents of the president, appealing to the same level of thinking and exploiting the very same algorithm, are attempting to create in popular consciousness a new image, as an incarnation of paramount evil. There is a question about whether or not this anti-myth can be made real in social thought today. It is not, as we have seen, that only a vivid, impressive subject ends up projected on to the screen of mythological thinking. The clichés that today fill up all the central press, and opposition publications too, when transplanted directly on to Kalmyk soil, have lost their novelty and simply go in one ear and out the other. Apart from that, life in Kalmykia is barely distinguishable from the life of people elsewhere in Russia: in any case, being located in the immediate vicinity of the most violent 'hot spots' of the former USSR and of Russia, the inhabitants naturally value peacefulness and stability in the republic. Finally, to a not inconsiderable extent society's psychological self-defence mechanism rejects harmful irritants.

Sensing this, opponents of Ilyumzhinov are all the more often turning to the personality of B. B. Gorodovikov, offsetting the figure of a politician made wiser by experience against the image of a young president. However, discourses on Gorodovikov manifest themselves as nothing but a fragment of a mythological meta-text, despite the fact that it is hardly possible for such fragments to become a reality nowadays. That is why, notwithstanding all the attractiveness of the opposition, they are unable to become a meaningful element out of which it would be possible for a new hero-myth to grow up.

The tragic death of one of the most consistent political adversaries of Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, the editor of the opposition newspaper *Soviet Kalmykia*, Larisa Yudina, in 1998 provoked not inconsiderable social agitation, discussions and rumours. The inconceivable brutality, the officially acknowledged lack of motivation for the crime itself and the court decision (according to which the murder was classified as a 'normal' – not political – one) was popularly perceived as a covert reprisal against the most dangerous political antagonist. However, there was no evidence of the authorities' involvement, but the development of a mythological paradigm received a further impetus. The journalist's demise was evaluated by many as the sacrifice of a hero

– actually, a heroine – in a skirmish with dark forces, in a fight between good and evil.

The emergence and continuing existence of mythological texts have their own laws, conditions and prerequisites, the alteration of which, even from the best of motives, is scarcely feasible. For this deep-rooted changes in the life of the community are required, which could stimulate and bring to life new mythological themes. Unexpected turns in political life will be immediately assimilated by mythological modes of thought and represented in the guise of new myths.

Life is more complicated than myths, because what is possible to do in a mythological 'virtual reality' is impossible to do in actual real life. In the Kalmyk Republic, as previously, there are many problems, primarily economic ones. Just as in the rest of Russia, everything is as it had been, and no one has yet managed to make Kalmykia into the land of Bumba.

Conclusions

Metamorphoses in Kalmyk ethnicity in a period of transformations

Turning our attention to the nature of ethnicity, I would like in this conclusion to survey one of the components of this phenomenon, namely the manner in which ethnic identities of Kalmyks are constructed, and how they are altered in a period of radical social changes. In the family of Soviet nations, each people had its own image both at an official level and informally, supported by the administrative and intellectual elite of each ethnic group. This image was developed by representatives of the artistic, creative intelligentsia, was underpinned by the official ideology and was circulated in school programmes and the mass media.

The Kalmyks' national dignity in Soviet times

Were you to have had occasion in the 1970s to hold a conversation with a Kalmyk concerning his or her people, sooner or later you would have been told of one of the things that was an object of national pride in those years.

Folklore

In their imagery, Kalmyk folk tales occupy second place in the world after Indian ones. This observation by the famous Mongolologist, Professor B. Ya. Vladimirtsov, was accepted among the Kalmyk people at face value, without academic hair-splitting, as some kind of axiom. By such a comparison it was as if the Kalmyks were placed on the same footing as one of the most ancient peoples, whose original civilization continues to amaze even in our own day. Salient to this comparison is the fact that India is an Oriental state and the cradle of Buddhism. It is reckoned that the Kalmyk language reached its apex in the *Jangar* epic, which stands in the same rank as such masterpieces of epic art as the Finnish *Kalevala* or the Georgian epic *The Knight in a Tiger Skin*. Obviously all peoples could boast of their epic works but the Kalmyks would have every right to do so.

History

The Kalmyks willingly entered into the make-up of Russia and were not conquered like the majority of other nations of the USSR. Actually, the Oirats came into Russia for an array of reasons, among which a fear of military aggression on the part of the Eastern Mongols and their Kazakh neighbours and a search for free pasture lands were fundamental factors.

One of the first oaths of loyalty to the Russian state – the Kalmyk oath of fealty – was given in 1609. This year is considered to be the starting point in the process of the Kalmyks' coming into the configuration of the Russian state, a process that was finally completed by 1661. By the agreements put into place, the Kalmyks did not pay tribute and did not send hostages to Moscow, but had to perform military service, protecting the southern borders of Russia, as regular contractors, receiving the munitions and ammunition necessary for this.

From my own childhood I remember the accounts of adults about how, purportedly, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1959 raised an objection to the idea of widely marking the 350th anniversary of the Kalmyks' voluntary entry into the composition of Russia. Allegedly it was only the argument that the 300th anniversary of the Kalmyks' entry had been celebrated under Nicholas the Second in 1909 that had any effect. Hearing of this, N. S. Khrushchev exclaimed, 'Well, if Nicky marked the occasion!' – and gave his agreement.

For the majority of Kalmyks the topic under discussion is not simply a fact of history, but is a historical background for personal ethnic biography. I cite the example of how a classmate of mine, who had been invited for an interview in the USA with a view to working for a respectable company, was asked briefly to relate his biography. He began his account with the words, 'The Kalmyks came to Russia four centuries ago.'[1]

The Kalmyks participated in Russia's wars and even entered Paris in 1813. A defence of Russia's interests, the protection of its southern borders and involvement in other important military campaigns – at which times the Kalmyk cavalry successfully joined battle with Turks, Swedes and French – are facts of pre-Revolutionary history most frequently mentioned by the official historiography in Soviet times. With pride it is related that the Russian army's war cry, 'Ura!', maintained right up to the present day, derives from Oirat-Kalmyk military clan war cries, which were different for each clan. The Kalmyks even now remember songs about how their ancestors contended with the enemies of Russia.

Kalmyk tourists have been to Germany and visited Leipzig, in the vicinity of which a monument was set up dedicated to 'the Battle of the Nations', in which Kalmyk divisions fought. This monument was so constructed as to have portrayed in relief on its walls representatives of all the troops who had taken part in the battle, and on its inner wall were carved the names of

all peoples who had sent their soldiers for the liberation of Europe, among them the Kalmyks.

Another source of the Kalmyks' pride in their history was the number of Kalmyk Heroes of the Soviet Union. Kalmykia takes one of the first places among the national republics of the USSR in the number of its natives who have received the title Hero of the Soviet Union. There were twenty-two of them. If such patriotism were to be expressed mathematically per head of the general population it would confirm the people's fidelity to Russia. The last words of one of these heroes – 'Kalmyks die, but do not surrender' – should be extrapolated on to the whole nation. As was described in Chapter 2, the Kalmyks were exiled at the end of 1943 and Kalmyk soldiers as well as officers were recalled from the front lines at the beginning of 1944. Moreover, many Kalmyks who had been recommended for a distinguished medal received instead the Order of the Patriotic War, or something else of lesser prestige, because they were Kalmyks. In such a way the number of heroes could possibly have been greater, as the war lasted for the Kalmyks not four years but three. Apparently this statistic of heroism was important as a counter-argument against the accusation of treason according to which the Kalmyk people were punished in 1943.

Great people

All Kalmyks are aware of, and proud of the fact that, Lenin's grandmother on his father's side was a Kalmyk woman. Even if this is a distant kinship – though it is nevertheless on the more important patrilineal side – it surely had to testify to a special sentiment towards the Kalmyks on the part of the leader of the world's proletariat. Hence a special meaning is imparted to Lenin's address to the Kalmyk workers, which began with the words 'Brothers – Kalmyks!' When I was eleven years old my father took me to Lenin's museum apartment in the Kremlin and with significance showed me the map of Russia hung on the wall, where in the region between the rivers Volga and Ural was written 'Kalmyks'. A kinship between Lenin and the Kalmyk people was emphasized each spring, when on 22 April the Young Pioneers of Kalmykia brought bouquets of tulips to his mausoleum in quantities equal to the number of years since his birthday.

However, in the 'years of stagnation' Lenin's biography as a great son of the Russian people had to accord with the needs of the state, and therefore his descent had to approximate maximally to that of an ethnic Russian. Therefore the single source in which is mentioned information about Lenin's grandmother, a baptized Astrakhan Kalmyk named Anna Smirnova, was Marietta Shaginyan's book *The Family of the Ulyanovs* in its earlier editions. Later Soviet editions failed to mention it, but in the post-perestroika period information on this topic has begun to be published once more.[2] Therefore in Kalmykia the name of Marietta Shaginyan is specially honoured,

with all due recognition accorded to her for the courage she showed in representing historical reality; this is partly connected with her own non-Russian origin – she was Armenian – and a natural solidarity with representatives of non-Russian minorities.

Although implicitly, it is assumed that in any Russian person there flows foreign blood, but a fact remembered by all Kalmyks is that Kalmyk blood actually flowed in Lenin, and also in the chemist D. Mendeleyev, General L. Kornilov and the famous lawyer Plevako. Therefore, despite the fact that the portrait of Lenin in different republics acquired features of the native inhabitants, the Kalmyks have won back their own – one might say 'authentic' – right of kinship. A poet wrote about this as follows:

> Lenin – it resounds in all languages.
> Lenin – simple and great.
> The Kazakh says that Lenin is Kazakh,
> But I say – a Kalmyk!
> The Kumyk says that Lenin is Kumyk,
> The Chuvash says Chuvash,
> Indisputably, friends, he is of course yours!
> But really he is Kalmyk![3]

A. S. Pushkin is loved in Kalmykia even more than Lenin. In many of his verses and prose he mentioned Kalmyks and he was on our steppe while travelling to Arzrum. But the Russian poet received a special gratitude among the Kalmyk people for a Kalmyk story that is related by Pugachev in 'The captain's daughter', whose freedom-loving nature reflects such recognized national characteristics as freedom and dignity: 'rather than feed on carrion for 300 years, better once to slake one's thirst with living blood and then whatever God gives!'[4] Kalmyks are also grateful to Pushkin for his poems dedicated to a Kalmyk woman, in which the author expresses a willingness to remain on account of the beautiful women in our regions and found in her no less virtues than among the genteel lionesses of St Petersburg:

> Farewell, adorable Kalmyk lass!
> Despite my worldly assets,
> My routine – laudable as it was –
> Was very nearly enticed, out on the steppe,
> To go after your nomad tent![5]

In the 'years of stagnation' Pushkin's theme was one of the most popular in the recitations of Kalmykia's national poet, David Kugul'tinov, who in the course of time has acquired the authority of a contemporary Kalmyk Pushkin. Kugul'tinov had a mastery of the Russian language 'almost like Pushkin' and enjoyed great success in any Russian-speaking auditorium; his works

were well known throughout the whole land and when he spoke about his trips abroad the Kalmyks understood how much the Soviet power had given the people. One of Kugul'tinov's famous discourses was an analysis of Pushkin's well known 'Memorial', in which an array of ethnic groups is named: 'the proud grandson of the Slavs, the Finn, the recently wild Tungus and a friend of the steppe, the Kalmyk'.[6] The Kalmyk poet substantiated such an order – 'equalizing minority peoples with all the rest'[7] – foreseeing that 'centuries later Russian literature and culture will be perceived and interpreted by many of those who at that time had been "wild" peoples of Russia'.[8]

For a long time the various sculptures set up around Elista, the capital of Kalmykia, had been dedicated to only three persons: V. I. Lenin, A. S. Pushkin and O. I. Gorodovikov. As an aside I could mention that even in our own day, in April 1999, I saw in a souvenir shop in Elista, among the ordinary goods as souvenirs of Kalmykia, two small busts: they were portraits of Lenin and Pushkin.

It is not by chance that the facts of normative history enumerated above have taken shape in popular consciousness, but were picked out in view of their loyalty to the state authorities and the political dividends that were received by the power-holding elite. Such an interpretation of history, and the way it is construed and orientated to the patronage of Russia, where 'the Kalmyks found their homeland', reinforced a basic level of ethnic identity as 'Volga Kalmyks or Russian Kalmyks', although for a long time a fundamental level of identity had been the *ulus*, or the Kalmyks' consciousness of themselves in ethno-territorial terms. It is not by accident that the Kalmyks' kinship with Lavr Kornilov (one of the Tsar's generals, who fought against the Red Army in the civil war) was kept quiet when the Communist Party was in power, or that the Kalmyks' participation on the side of the peasants in the uprisings of Yemelyan Pugachev or Stepan Razin were described in more detail – although Kalmyks fought on both sides in the conflict and material on how Kalmyks suppressed the rebelling peasants is to be found in those very same archives. However, an accent on the Kalmyks' solidarity with the oppressed masses was more in accord with the ideological doctrine of that time.

New values of the transition period

The post-Soviet period brought much that was new into the life of the peoples of Russia. Among other things, substantial changes took place in the very phenomenon of the Kalmyks' ethnicity and their consciousness of being distinctive from other nationalities of Russia. The policy of openness (*glasnost*) and democratization in politics and the social sciences had far-reaching significance. As was the case for the other nations of the former USSR, after a change in the prevailing ideological paradigm the Kalmyks once more turned to their own history, trying to find in it answers to the burning issues of the day.

The new historical discourse placed the accent not on the entry into Russia but on an earlier period, the history of the Oirats. A result of this was the formulation of a proposal by activists of Kalmyk social organizations to change the name of the ethnic group from 'Kalmyks' to 'Oirat-Kalmyks', and policies were launched for the introduction of such a dual ethnonym as a designation for the modern nation. It is as if the very ethnonym 'Kalmyks' separated the Kalmyks from the preceding Oirat history, since it was connected with the coming of the Oirats within the confines of Russia, where they began to call themselves Kalmyks. This not only had the consequence of bringing medieval history closer to the present day, but also saw an effort to 'cleanse' ethnic culture from later accretions. Hence purists changed their attitude to Kalmyk male attire, which during the time of living within Russia had been subjected to significant influence from the Caucasus region and even began to be given a similar name, *beshmyud* (*beshmet*). In the past ten years Kalmyk artists have begun to prefer special costumes in a Mongolian pattern – a dress of the *deel* type – and several of them wear boots in the style of the Mongolian *gutul*.

It seems that in recent decades clan identities, which in the Soviet period had been discredited, have once more been remembered. For many years any stress on connections with one's clan was perceived as 'clannishness' or '*ulus*ism', and people showing anything of this kind were not only fired from their jobs but in the 1930s and 1940s were put in prison. Nowadays it is with pride that people name their settlements, enterprises and shops after their clans: *Iki Chonos* (Large Wolves), *Iki Bukhus* (Big Bulls) or *Kharnut* (Swarthy). Books have also appeared on the history of 'small homelands': *Erketeni*, *The Grabbevskaya encampment* and *Khoton Endyr*.[9]

In recent years the idea of 'white bone' has once more begun to be remembered and put into practice. At the time of the first exodus in 1771 the Kalmyk khan Ubushi took away with him a significant part of the people and a majority of the aristocracy. Since then the khan's line has come to an end among the Kalmyks, but there do remain representatives of other degrees of nobility: *noyon*s (nobles placed at the head of an *ulus*) and *zaisang*s (lower-level nobility). A hunting out of them in the 1920s and 1930s resulted in practically all descendants of the *noyon*s being wiped out, and those who came from *zaisang* stock preferred not to recall the fact. My father, who passed away in 1980, not even once told me that my grandfather had been a *zaisang*: I was told by other people only in the period of perestroika. Not uncommonly this has led to some people nowadays starting to call themselves descendants of the aristocracy, at times without possessing any genealogical basis for the claim, something that would have been unthinkable even in the 1920s, because the lines of descent among the nobility were known by each and every Kalmyk. Nowadays, however, when a verbal tradition on this topic has been severed, belonging to the 'white bone' is not perceived as a social responsibility by kinsfolk. In Russia gatherings of the gentry have sprung up and those accepted as princes are acknowledged as

such not merely on the basis of birth: for modern people, to be registered as an aristocrat is not regarded as a major sin. Hence an eye-witness related to me how a drunken old woman retorted angrily, 'Now, we are all *zaisang*s!'[10]

One way or another the idea of the 'white bone' rose to the surface at the time of presidential elections, which among the Kalmyks usually mobilize traditional identities. Hence in the 1990 elections there was gossip going around that the votes had to return a president from the Black Earth district, because territory in that particular district had formerly been included in the Erketenovskiy *ulus*, which in its time had been the khan's. Likewise, after the elections those people who were dissatisfied with the policies of President Ilyumzhinov sought explanations in his origins too: they said that there had not been any 'white bones' among the Don Kalmyks, and aristocracy for the Kalmyks was – first of all – a responsibility to one's subjects. However, as the Don Kalmyks had adopted the social organization of the Don Cossacks, there was no demand for such a policy from the president.

If you met with a Kalmyk nowadays his discourse about his people would consist of various topics:

1 We have a young president, who is also president of the International Chess Federation.
2 The Kalmyks are the sole Buddhist people in Europe.
3 The Kalmyks were deported in the Stalinist period, but could survive, return and remember those years without animosity.
4 The football team Uralan has played in the premier league, and the International Chess Olympiad took place in Elista in 1998.
5 More likely than not, he would boast of his relatives in the USA.

If one looks at how the content of what is a source of pride for the Kalmyks has changed, then one should take notice of the fact that in the 1970s dignity was attached to the past, whereas in our own time this pride is connected with current life, with the present.

Let us dwell in more detail on these attitudes, which, in the respondents' opinion, mark out the Kalmyks from other Russian nationalities.

Civil identities

Being citizens of the Kalmyk ASSR, the Kalmyks were especially proud of this level of statehood only in the first years after the restoration of the republic – at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s – when the public rehabilitation of the nation was a step forward from the Siberian state of possessing no rights, and it was an acknowledgement of the Kalmyk people's innocence. Once they had become used to the fact of the republic's restoration, an 'autonomous' state system began to be perceived as second-rate; accordingly, among those who possessed this autonomy, if in the theatre of the nations of the USSR they were not up 'in the gods' at the rear (as

representatives of peoples lacking their own titular forms of statehood), then they were somewhere on the balconies of the first tier. An authentic pride in citizenship appeared after the promulgation of the Declaration of Sovereignty, which created the Republic of Kalmykia with its own anthem and flag. Unfortunately, an apt text and stately music did not affect the fate of the Kalmyk anthem, which was similar to the fate of the Russian anthem. Apparently this was related both to the way in which the Kalmyk text is not easily memorized by the Russian-speaking population and to the way in which a policy of learning the national anthem was not taken up by the leadership. There was also significance in the fact that in traditional society the Kalmyks did not have a sole national anthem but each clan had its own one.

The election of the first President of the Kalmyk Republic evoked mass euphoria in Kalmykia. His unpredictable image and young age have become components of the republic's image. Tolerance and legitimacy, attributed to the Kalmyks, and a perception of him by part of the populace as like an epic hero or khan, have made him into a symbol of the Republic. K. Ilyumzhinov himself, by his support for sport, reinforces civic identities by making use of sporting symbols: a world boxing champion – a citizen of the republic, of Tajik descent – and the republic's football team (the core of which is made up primarily of Ukrainians) in the premier league. On days when the Uralan team is playing or Raimkul Malakhbekov is taking part in a boxing match, none of the republic's inhabitants can tear their eyes away from the TV, and when Uralan play in Volgograd or Rostov-on-Don the streets of Elista are empty because all the men who are able to have gone to support their homeland's team. How much the republic's sporting successes have been important for the state authorities is evidenced by the fact that, of the five people who have been awarded the highest medal of the Republic, a 'Hero of Kalmykia' (gold, platinum or diamond), three of them are sports personalities. When I asked school children in Elista about which festivals in their lives they are most enthralled by, among other answers I received one that said, 'A real festival for me was when Uralan beat Rotor.'[11]

As the capital of a republic whose people had at one time been deported, Elista was for a long time closed to foreigners. Therefore the holding of major international chess tournaments in Elista is far from 'coincidental', but in a systematic manner continues the process of rehabilitation of the Kalmyk people on what is already an international level.

On the president's initiative and in accordance with his decree for bringing national sport back to life, every year in Kalmykia a 'Jangariad' now takes place, that name being given to a sports day for Kalmyk sports. In Chapter 3 it was mentioned that many of these sports had virtually faded into oblivion but now the list of sporting events includes horse races over a distance of 50 kilometres (and only on race horses of a Kalmyk breed), archery, Kalmyk wrestling in three weight categories – those of elephant, wild boar and lion – javelin throwing and lasso throwing with a live target. When this decree was enacted, it came to light that the general public had

practically forgotten how to straighten out the bow and what sorts of arrows had to be used. However, responsibility for carrying out the decree lay with the president's local representatives, who tried in every way possible to hold on to their positions and were personally interested in executing the decree. In this way state and popular interests, and the personal interests of the government apparatus, coincided in the restoration of historical forms of sport. It was this combination of interests that ensured that the reinstatement of national sports was successful.

The return of religion to the contemporary life of Kalmyks

After the destruction by the end of the 1930s of all Buddhist temples in Kalmykia (which at the beginning of the century had numbered over 100), the Kalmyks moved further and further away from the 'yellow faith'. Several people with higher Buddhist education – including those who had not gone off with the German forces but had survived in prison camps and places of exile – did not have an opportunity to practise legally. Religious life was concentrated in the domestic sphere and for the most part was practised by older people.

In Soviet times there were many appeals to open even just one Buddhist temple, but the local party leadership flatly refused to do so. It was only in 1989 that a 'prototype temple' was opened in Elista after being shut for half a century, and in 1995 a full Buddhist temple was built and consecrated. Since then about forty Buddhist temples have been constructed in the republic. However, nowadays Buddhism is still perceived by the majority of the population in terms of its external forms – that is, its ritual side – rather than its spiritual side. An example – which also serves as a confirmation – is the fact that in the temples that have been constructed there are insufficient qualified staff for conducting vital services. The erection of a temple in their own district or state farm has been considered a matter of honour by many residents of the republic. However, a problem with personnel has arisen. The first group of disciples who were sent to India and Mongolia in 1989 to receive a Buddhist education have not yet finished their course of study, which can take about twenty years. The image of the clergy has itself changed: the first monks were invited from Buryatia and Tuva, and it turned out that many of them were married and had children; their families live in three *khurul*s, and are not devoid of unhealthy habits. In Kalmykia, however, despite the absence of any legal practising of the monastic life during the Soviet period, what seemed to be natural was a strict monastic way of life and a rigorous fulfilment of their vows by those committed to a spiritual way of life, in accordance with what was remembered by old people.

The clergy became indispensable participants at all official events and had to be present to sanctify and adorn public proceedings. Their claret-coloured attire, shaven heads and unusual monotone prayers evoke something of a holy awe even in those who consider themselves atheists.

Irrespective of any personal faith, it has been gratifying for the republic's citizens that the Kalmyks belong to a people whose ancestors about four centuries ago adopted Buddhism, which has a reputation as an intellectual religion, and that they are the only Buddhist people in Europe. It also had significance that in Russia there are few peoples who can be considered as gathered together by a faith, even though they are territorially distant. Buddhism noticeably distinguished the Kalmyk people from an array of neighbouring ethnic groups.

Whereas in the years prior to perestroika Buddhism had been presented in official circles as a survival of the past that the Kalmyk people had successfully overcome, in the present it has become one of the basic elements of national pride. For instance, whereas a typical theme of doctoral theses at the beginning of the 1970s had been 'The coming into being of mass atheism in Kalmykia', at the end of the 1980s researchers preferred to study the religious model of Buddhism in Kalmykia. Attitudes to religion have changed within society itself. In recent years the office of Shajin-Lama was reinstated in Kalmykia, and a twenty-year-old Kalmyk from the USA was chosen for it.

In the end the names of many clergy who had been repressed, and also the names of clerics holding high office, have become widely known. Whereas formerly people preferred to hush up their ties of kinship with them, now they are proud of such kindred. One such priest was Gevshe Vyang'yal, who at the beginning of the 1920s had been sent from Kalmykia to study in Tibet but on account of the persecution of religion in his own land had not returned to his native country. After a Kalmyk society had come into being in the USA the Gevshe joined up with them. It is his name that is associated with the spread of Buddhism in the USA.

A deportation complex

After returning 'from Siberia' in 1957–8, the Kalmyks tried to forget these 'thirteen accursed years' and the authorities to make it look as if these years had not existed. An attempt to forget what was bad, connected with the years of deportation, is explicable not only by the nature of the memories themselves but also by what had been stubbornly propagated by official authorities for the actions of the so-called 'Kalmyk cavalry corps' that was formed at the time of the German occupation of the republic. Despite the fact that the people's honour during the war was redeemed by the 110th Kalmyk cavalry division, the very fact of collaboration with the fascists by individual representatives of the Kalmyk people induced a feeling of shame among the Kalmyks. Probably this is partly connected with the way in which the Kalmyks had settled in Russia as troops who had defended the southern borders, and a fundamental level of the people's identity even in our own day is that of Volga Kalmyks or Russian Kalmyks. Therefore an official recognition of the fact of collaboration with the occupiers, strengthened at

the end of the 1960s during a public legal enquiry into those who had taken part in the punitive actions, pointed to treachery and, consequently, indicated the 'fairness' of the punishment. A vocabulary of defending human rights, as applied to this problematic issue in the republic, has not been formulated even up to the present time.

The decree on rehabilitation of the repressed nations in 1989 understood the problem of territorial rehabilitation but did not make a lasting impact: this question was frozen for four years and is taboo even now. At the same time the debunking of the Communist Party, Stalin and the KGB in the press after perestroika dissolved the ban on this theme. Simultaneously the appearance of the figure of President Ilyumzhinov and his striking image lifted a 'Siberian complex' off the older generation of Kalmyks; people felt themselves no worse than other ethnic groups and the fear inherent in totalitarian society passed away, along with the possibility that all might be repeated.

Phenotype as a factor in identity

In the formation of the Kalmyks' ethnic identity a salient role has been played by their belonging to the Mongolian race, which has sharply singled out the Kalmyks from surrounding peoples of Russia. In the fifteenth century, in order to pick out the Oirats from the Eastern Mongols, the wearing of a special ethnically distinguishing symbol on the headgear – a red tassel – was required, in as much as the neighbours surrounding the Oirats were similar in language, dress, material culture and religious attitudes.

Once they had settled in the south of Russia, and dwelling there for almost four centuries, the Kalmyks did not feel a particular necessity for any special markings: this was, as they say, on the face. Probably it is for this reason that the Kalmyks have not tried to preserve their ethnicity at any cost, as they supposed that it is reproduced just like the 'Mongolian spot' on the sacrum of new-born Kalmyk children.

The phenotype inherent in being a Kalmyk has become one of the most salient factors in fixing ethnic identity. It is the phenotype in itself that constitutes the most important marker of Kalmyk ethnicity, if it is acknowledged that a central element in the analysis of the phenomenon of ethnicity is the ethnic boundary defining the group.[12] If even Tatars living in St Petersburg deem it impossible to change ethnic identity on account of physical appearance, then this is even more the case for the Kalmyks, representing the classical Mongolian racial type in physical anthropology.[13]

Between Europe and Asia

The basic disposition of the Kalmyks' values and priorities is that of being between Europe and Asia. The Kalmyks live simultaneously in two worlds, but an orientation towards European culture (Russian or Western) is making

significant progress. This is manifested in a strengthening of individualism as a strategy for living – in contrast to being dominated by a kinship group, which in the transitional period is rapidly yielding its position. For the most part 'Western values' are facilitated by the overarching status of the Russian language and of literature in Russian. Russo-Kalmyk bilingualism has become not simply an ethnic practicality, but a desired and so far unattainable norm, as the dominance of Russian has become customary in recent years in all spheres, including that of the family, alongside a poor knowledge or a complete ignorance of the native language. For the sake of high average marks on their school certificates, many urban pupils veer away from a study of the Kalmyk language in their final year, as they cannot aspire to high scores and there is no reproach for such stratagems in social opinion.

An orientation towards Occidental standards is manifested, for example, in the widespread custom of clinking glasses together when drinking spirits. This custom was absent from the Kalmyks' traditional culture. More than that, the chink of crockery was regarded as a bad omen, as a sign of possible ruin or collapse. Therefore the majority of Kalmyks, recognizing the necessity of joining glasses after a toast, do it after first covering with the hand the whole side surface of the utensil, so that it is the hands that touch and not the glass. In this way a compromise between the two traditions is attained, and not only in the example given here. One could say that a style of life has begun to take shape combining in itself values that are both traditional and modern, Kalmyk and Russian, Eastern and Western. This is well seen in the use of the calendar. Cognizant that daily life and work have to be in accordance with the Gregorian calendar accepted throughout the whole world, the Kalmyks perform their betrothal, wedding and burial ceremonies according to the traditional calendar. A high percentage of inter-ethnic marriages, notions of beauty in which are expressed indicators of mixed breeding and the common distribution of 'Russian' names also testify to Western orientations. The Kalmyks' phenotype, however, firmly bound up with the East, is an incentive towards creating an image of a people from 'civilized Asia' – a nation with its own statehood, unorthodox president, Buddhist culture and a diaspora abroad that is scattered almost as much as would be the case for a larger people group – and this image continues to be created. The influence is mutual: the changing image of the nation in turn has an influence on the people themselves, who endeavour to conform more to the altered image.

A constructed image depends not only on the tastes and wishes of the political and intellectual elites 'for whom ethnic identity itself becomes a contested resource'.[14] It also depends on the image of peoples who historically were close to the Kalmyks, and as a result of this are perceived as competitors. For the Kalmyks, such peoples were the Mongols, Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, and later the Buryats were added to them. So, for example, the celebrations of a thousand years of the Kyrgyz *Manas* and the Buryat *Geser* epics resulted in a question being raised about the age of the *Jangar* epic,

because it seems to many that the Kalmyk epic could not have been created later than the epics of the Kyrgyz and Buryats by half a millennium.

Competition continues in the sphere of history and attempts to read it anew. It is impossible to say that the contemporary image of the nation has fully ousted the sources of national pride mentioned in an earlier section, which, although they have also been routinized, nevertheless continue to remain within the repertoire of active ethnic values. Although these have receded to a secondary plane, they are nevertheless supported both 'from below and from above'. Ilyumzhinov during his pre-election campaign expressed a readiness to transfer Lenin's mausoleum from Moscow to Elista if the central state authorities were to insist on the dismantling of the burial vault. Moreover, now that he has become the republic's president he tries to combine 'new' and 'old' values of the nation, as it is uncertain just what kinds of values will become relevant in the near and unpredictable future. Hence the main arterial road through Elista and also the central square continue to bear the name Lenin, but the monument to the leader of the proletariat located in the centre of this square was turned around 180 degrees in 1998 so that the face of the former leader was facing towards the recently erected statue of Buddha, and also towards the House of Government where the president's administration is situated. In 2004 the monument to Lenin was dismantled, largely because the position of the communists in Russia had finally weakened.

In post-Soviet conditions Kalmyk ethnicity has received a powerful impulse towards change and development, having become one of the central linchpins of political mobilization. The coming into being in Kalmykia of a presidential republic with the conventional attributes of statehood – a national anthem, coat of arms, flag and ideological doctrine – gave rise to greater attention and feedback than had previously been given to the phenomenon of ethnicity.

Appendix A
Population figures for Kalmykia

Table A1 Changes in urban and rural populations, Kalmyk ASSR, 1939–95

	1939	*1959*	*1970*	*1979*	*1989*	*1994*	*1995*
Urban population (thousands)	30	39	92	119	148	120	121
Rural population (thousands)	149	146	176	175	175	201	199

Table A2 Changes in the urbanization rate, 1985–95

	1985	*1990*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Urban population					
No. of immigrants	9,434	7,730	3,627	4,478	4,966
Per 1000 population	28.7	23.6	30.3	37.0	40.5
No. of emigrants	9,163	7,001	3,335	3,419	3,749
Per 1000 population	27.8	21.4	27.9	28.3	30.6
Rural population					
No. of immigrants	14,954	12,018	5,209	5,352	5,475
Per 1000 population	45.4	36.8	25.9	26.9	27.9
No. of emigrants	14,814	12,766	9,016	8,784	9,224
Per 1000 population	45.0	39.1	44.8	44.1	45.6

Appendix B
Kalmyk kinship terms

Table A3 Kinship terms in a direct line of ascent, beginning from the father

1	Father	etsk	Mother	aka
2	Grandfather	aava	Grandmother (father's mother)	aaje
3	Great-grandfather	alntsg aava	Great-grandmother on the father's side	alntsg aaje
4	Great-great-grandfather	hulntsg etsk	Great-great-grandmother	hulntsg aaje
5	Great-great-great-grandfather	solntsg etsk	Great-great-great-grandmother	solntsg aaje
6	Great-great-great-great-grandfather	tolntsg etsk	Great-great-great-great-grandmother	tolntsg aaje
7	Root, clan originator	ug	Root, clan originator	ug
8		ung		tohm
9		jith		iozur

Table A4 Kinship terms in a direct line of descent, beginning from son and daughter

Descent from a son		*Descent from a daughter*	
1 Sons	kövüd	Daughters	kükükd ürn
2 Grandsons	achnr	Granddaughters through a daughter	ze kükükd
3 Great-grandsons	jichnr	Great-granddaughters through a daughter	zeents kükükd
4 Great-great-grandsons	jiliknr	Great-great-granddaughters	zeentsr kükükd
5 Great-great-great-grandsons	guchnr	Great-great-great-granddaughters	zeets kükükd
6 Great-great-great-great-grandsons	sala	Great-great-great-great-granddaughters	zeetsr kükükd
7 Great-great-great-great-great-grandsons	saltr	Great-great-great-great-great-granddaughters	zeet küküd
8 Great-great-great-great-great-great-grandsons	saltrg	Great-great-great-great-great-great-granddaughters	zeetr küküd
9 Great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandsons	jirtn	Great-great-great-great-great-great-great-granddaughters	tasrha-ösrkä

Glossary of main Kalmyk terms used

är'kä vodka, distilled from milk.
bortsg a farinaceous food product, fried in fat; often a constituent of ritual fare.
burkhan (a) a deity; (b) an image of a deity.
ishkä ger a felt tent.
jangarchi a performer of the songs of the *Jangar* epic.
khadmlgn custom of avoidance, taken as a norm of behaviour for a young daughter-in-law.
kharal curse; one of the genres of folk oral creative expression.
khurul a monastery complex with a temple.
magtal eulogy; one of the genres of folk oral creative expression.
medlgchi a folk healer.
todo bichig Kalmyk written script.
tokug a silver pendant at the end of a woman's tress.
torl kin group.
ulus an ethno-territorial subdivision of the people and the area inhabited by this group.
yoräl blessing; one of the genres of folk oral creative expression.
yorälchi the person who utters a *yoräl* at a particular time, or an expert in the rendition of *yoräl*s.

Notes

Preface

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Chapter 2: Deportation as a collective trauma: thirteen years, thirteen days

This chapter, and indeed the book as a whole, was originally written in 1999. Since then I have been specially investigating the period of the deportation and further details are included in E.-B. M. Guchinova, *Помнить нельзя забыть.*

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Chapter 4: Language and the ethno-linguistic situation

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Chapter 8: Food, dress and ornament

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